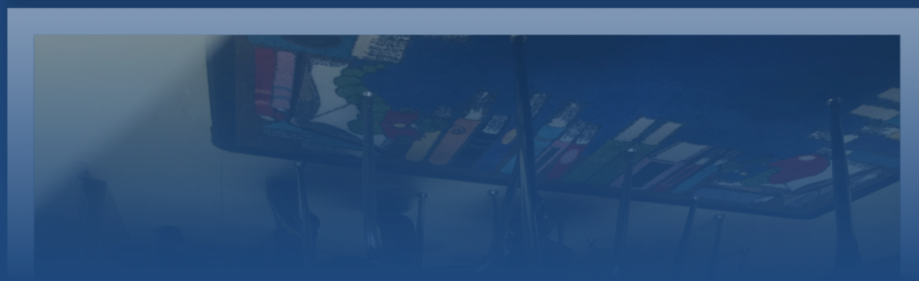


# Breaking the Cycle

*A Study of the Elgin Children's Foundation Effort to Promote Early Literacy in Appalachia*



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*School wall tapestry depicts coal mining scene.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Statement of Problem

Sociologist Donald Hernandez (2011) found that students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. For students who are below-basic readers in third grade (as measured on the National Assessment of Educational Progress), 23% drop out or fail to finish high school and these outcomes are exacerbated by the impacts of growing up in poverty. Drawing from the work of Lynn Fielding, Nancy Kerr, and Paul Rosier (1998) who published *The 90% Reading Goal*, an account of the reading initiative in Kennewick School District in rural Washington state, the Elgin Children's Foundation aims to "break the cycle" of intergenerational poverty with a strategic focus on improving reading outcomes for elementary students in the Appalachian region.

### Project questions

We designed our qualitative project around three questions:

1. How was the literacy program implemented across schools? How, and to what extent, has literacy instruction changed as a result of the Elgin reading reform effort?
2. What do implementation patterns indicate regarding the impact on school culture and student achievement?
3. What factors (including human capital, financial, organizational, leadership) influence the long-term sustainability of the program?

### Findings

Utilizing a grounded theory approach, our findings arise from 55 key informant interviews including teachers, principals,

"We can eliminate illiteracy in our society. We can do this by eradicating below grade level reading achievement in our first, second, and third grades."

-Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 1998

district administrators, and Elgin literacy coaches. The language of the findings reflects the colloquial and conversational nature of our interviews, while also relating to constructs from the relevant literature on program implementation and sustainability.

### **1. That's Above My Pay Grade**

Many of the teachers and principals were not involved in the initial decision to bring the Elgin Reading Initiative to the district. Instead-, the process was driven by decisions by district superintendents and school boards who drove the implementation from the central office.

### **2. Minding the Kitchen**

The ECF literacy coaches were pivotal in ensuring program fidelity to the *Imagine It!* Reading curriculum. They were simultaneously perceived as knowledgeable and helpful while also being strict and demanding. The Elgin coaches were the external accountability partners who helped to “mind” the proverbial kitchen and ensure program fidelity.

### **3. Old Dog, New Tricks**

The introduction of the Reading Initiative required the most change from veteran teachers, many of whom were comfortable with their current methods. The implementation drove some veterans to retire and those who remained to radically change their teaching practices.

### **4. The Blue Band Ban**

The implementation of the *Imagine It!* Reading curriculum emphasized reading, decoding, and comprehension skills over language arts/writing skills. These language arts components were contained in the “blue band” of the reading textbook that was deemed “off limits” to teachers during the 3 hour reading block.

### **5. The Scores Show It**

Teachers’ buy-in to the Reading Initiative occurred as students’ reading performance improved. At schools where gains did not occur (or were not as profound), teachers did not fully buy-in.

### **6. From Worst to First**

The Reading Initiative had a profound, transformative effect on reading achievement in schools where the combination of principal and coach synergy, teacher buy-in, and data based decision making were evident.

## **7. You Don't Have to Be A Coal Miner**

The Appalachian region, already wracked by intergenerational poverty, is undergoing the decline of its coal-based economy and the dismantling of its middle class. Teachers and principals look to their students' reading success as a promising way to break the cycle of poverty and offer alternative employment options for the future.

## **8. Riding the Wall**

Ineffective principals "ride the wall," or casually observe what happens in their schools instead of providing proactive, instructional leadership. The effectiveness of the Reading Initiative is tied to strong literacy-minded leadership.

## **9. Hire Me Back When I Retire**

Many veteran teachers in the study are nearing retirement age, but they are deeply invested in the success of their schools and desire to be involved in the reading effort after they retire.

## **10. Laid Back, Fall Back**

Teachers are anxious about the end of the formal ECF partnership and fear that without support, their schools will return to old practices or dilute the initiative.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings presented above, the capstone team makes the following five (5) recommendations:

**1. Institute school-based literacy coaches to support program sustainability.** The ECF literacy coaches have been a vital part of the implementation of the Elgin Reading Initiative. Teachers and principals in our study point to coaches as a key mechanism for sustaining their efforts at the school level.

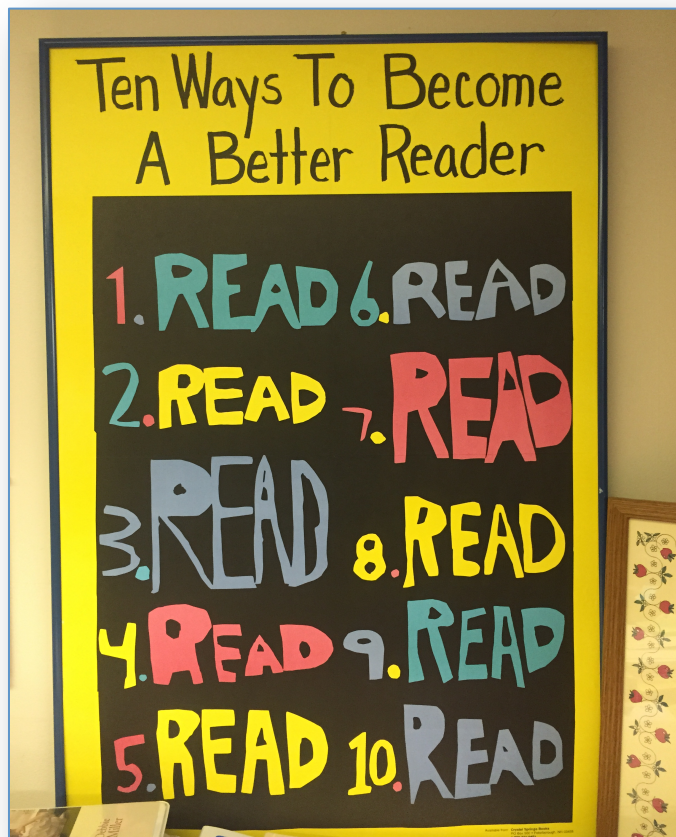
**2. Permit districts flexibility to shift reading scheduling to 2-hour block.** The three-hour reading block created a number of unintended consequences such as a narrowing of the curriculum and lessening of teacher ownership of struggling students within their homeroom. The block should be revised on a school-by-school basis with support for the bottom quartile of students occurring during the existing workshop hour.

**3. Continue ongoing summer onboarding & training.** The issue of teacher retirements, grade level placement changes, and new hires all require a proactive and ongoing training

approach. The ECF should continue to assist transitioning districts with summer professional development and support.

**4. Convene principals within Elgin partner schools for periodic sharing of best practices.** The principals in our study exhibited a number of promising practices that helped support reading implementation. However, many practices were not widely shared and increased communication between principals could help spur further innovation and student achievement.

**5. Initiate district sustainability planning meetings to negotiate the transition from Elgin funding.** In order to support continued implementation of the Reading Initiative, we recommend that the ECF initiate meetings with each district, including partner school principals. These meetings would allow the ECF to leverage funding and training to set the terms of any continued partnership(s).



*Photo taken at Tazewell County District Office.*

## DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM & PROJECT QUESTIONS

“We can eliminate illiteracy in our society. We can do this by eradicating below grade level reading achievement in our first, second, and third grades. We can eliminate illiteracy when our school districts publicly commit to teach 90% of the students to read at grade level by third grade, then systematically realign their assessments, curriculum, instructional time, reporting systems, and available resources to achieve this goal. We can eliminate illiteracy nationwide in four to seven years: 90% of third graders reading at or above grade level.” (Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 1998)

In 1998, Lynn Fielding, Nancy Kerr, and Paul Rosier published *The 90% Reading Goal*, an account of the reading initiative in Kennewick School District in Washington state. In their report, the authors described both the process of reform and the actionable steps the district took to achieve their stated goal that 90% of students would be reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade. The district achieved this goal through active and accountable leadership at the district and school level, data-driven decision making, and the development and execution of a clear and focused plan. In 2007, the authors published a second book, *Annual Growth for All Students, Catch-Up Growth for Those Who are Behind*, to continue the examination of Kennewick’s progress over the 10 years of implementation and to extend the focus from K-3 to K-12. In combination, these two books provided hope that raising the level of reading achievement is possible, as well as a clear description of how this district achieved their goal.

The importance of third grade reading proficiency to later achievement outcomes and expected lifetime earnings is well supported in the research literature. Sociologist Donald Hernandez (2011) found that students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. For students who are below-basic readers in third grade, 23% drop out or fail to finish high school. These outcomes are exacerbated by the impacts of growing up in poverty, where even proficient readers face an 11% dropout rate in comparison to only 2% for their more affluent peers. The connection between high school graduation and lifetime earnings, job placement, and future educational attainment are key drivers behind this work to ensure that children are proficient readers early in their school careers. The Kennewick model’s approach to addressing third grade reading achievement provided the inspiration and roadmap for the Elgin Children’s Foundation Reading Initiative.

Based in Knoxville, TN, the Elgin Children’s Foundation (ECF) is a non-profit, philanthropic organization focused on the health and education needs of children in

Southern Appalachia, specifically in the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. ECF began their work with a pediatric dental program utilizing a mobile dental unit and/or transporting children to local dentists for care. This program provided the initial partnership opportunity with schools in seven counties across the three states. ECF built upon that relationship with schools when it began its focus on improving educational outcomes through its Reading Initiative.

Beginning in 2010 and continuing today, ECF has partnered with school districts to implement a highly-structured, data-driven reading reform initiative. Based on the Kennewick model, the Elgin Reading Initiative requires participating school districts to implement the following guidelines to improve reading performance:

1. **Goal:** adopt the 90% reading goal across the district;
2. **Curriculum:** implement the *Imagine It!* literacy curriculum for all students in grades K-3 and the *Reading Mastery* (Direct Instruction) intervention curriculum for students who test at two grade levels below in reading;
3. **Professional Development:** attend summer trainings and collaborate with Elgin's instructional coaches for in-classroom coaching;
4. **Instructional Time:** schedule a two hour reading block to include heterogeneous whole group instruction and small group homogeneous instruction, with an additional hour of small group intervention for those children who qualify;
5. **Assessment:** utilize the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test to assess student reading performance in grades K-3, three times a year; and
6. **Pre-K and Summer Programs:** collaborate with local partners in early childhood education (ECE) and summer offerings.

Since the initiative's inception in 2010, 45 schools in 7 districts across Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia have implemented the program. Before the program, each school was scoring well below proficiency on state assessments. Since joining the Elgin initiative, the schools have produced a wide range of achievement, most demonstrating growth, a few nearing the 90% goal, but none achieving it yet. During this time, the Elgin Foundation collected quantitative data, primarily the results of the NWEA MAP assessments across K-3 and state test scores for third grade. Utilizing that data, reviews were conducted by outside research groups including RAND, Education Strategies Consulting, Battelle, and Education Consumers Foundation. However, the leadership at ECF recognized that the studies were not able to fully describe what was occurring in the schools participating in the project. While the scores demonstrated the outcomes of the efforts, there was little



information about how the initiative was actually being implemented, the impact the initiative was having on school culture, or if the results would be sustainable once ECF tapered their support and schools took on the onus of the program. Ultimately, ECF needed to know if this initiative was a worthwhile investment and if its money was being well spent!

ECF's vice president, Dr. Tim Rogers, presented a request for assistance to the Vanderbilt capstone researchers in May 2015 for a qualitative study of the initiative. Dr. Rodgers outlined in his plan the need for understanding of the initiative's implementation beyond just the test score results. He wanted the Vanderbilt capstone team to observe in classrooms, conduct interviews with teachers, administrators, and district leaders, and survey teachers and administrators to provide a deeper contextual understanding of what the prior quantitative studies had determined. Dr. Rogers further asked for consideration of the parent perspective, however in order to narrow our focus, we made the decision to focus solely on school faculty and staff for this study. Therefore, the qualitative study would help to explicate how and why the different schools achieved the results they did. After deeper conversation with Dr. Rogers, our team developed the following project questions to guide the study:

1. How was the literacy program implemented across schools? How, and to what extent, has literacy instruction changed as a result of the Elgin reading reform effort? (efficacy)
2. What do implementation patterns indicate regarding the impact on school culture and student achievement? (fidelity)
3. What factors (including human capital, financial, organizational, leadership) influence the long term sustainability of the program? (sustainability)

## **CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT**

### **The Client: The Elgin Children's Foundation**

The Elgin Children's Foundation (ECF), was established by B.R. Thompson in 2003, to serve children living in the rural communities of Southern Appalachia. Its mission statement directs ECF to work towards encouraging habits of lifetime wellness, educating children to become lifelong learners, and empowering communities to create and provide environments where children flourish and mature into productive citizens (Elgin Children's Foundation, 2015). Examples of ECF's different philanthropic efforts include

mobile medical and dental programs, child advocacy initiatives, and volunteer efforts with local boards and nonprofit organizations in supporting these communities. Partnerships between ECF and ten counties across three different states prioritize service to the youngest, the poorest, the most vulnerable, and the rurally isolated populations of Southern Appalachia.

### The Elgin Reading Initiative

*Breaking the Cycle: The Elgin Foundation Academic Reading Initiative* was developed in 2010 to improve early literacy in young children living in Southern Appalachian counties. The main goal behind the Reading Initiative is to ensure that 90% of students read on grade level by the end of third grade. Two main strategies to support the goal include making structural changes in schools and making changes in community culture. Table 1 notes the specific changes necessary to achieve the 90% reading goal.

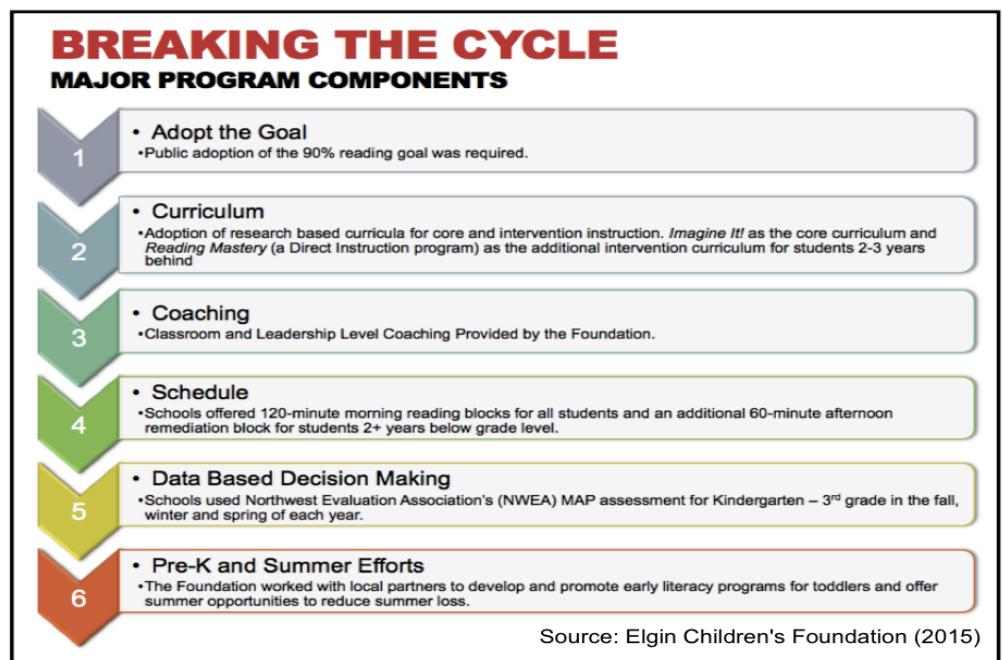
**Table 1: Changes and Strategies Towards 90% Reading Goal**

	Strategies
School Structures	Make structural changes within schools in priorities, curricula, training, use of time, assessment, use of data
Community Culture	Make changes in community culture involving the foundation of language and literacy among children from birth to age 5

Source: Elgin Children’s Foundation (2015)

**Chart 1: Breaking the Cycle: Major Program Components**

In addition to the main goal and strategies, the Reading Initiative centers around six major components: goal adoption, curricular choice, scheduling changes, data-based decision making, and PreK and summer efforts.



- The first component requires that participating school districts, with their building teams of administrators, faculty, and staff publicly adopt the 90% reading goal to ensure community awareness and acknowledgement of their task at hand.
- Following goal adoption, the second component requires participating schools to adopt the *Imagine It!* curriculum for their core reading program and *Reading Mastery* for their intervention program.
- In an effort to support faculty in using these curricular programs, the third component provides coaching support from ECF. These coaches are shared among partner schools and make site visits throughout the year to support teachers and school leaders.
- The fourth component of the Reading Initiative stipulates that participating schools make scheduling changes to include a 120-minute block for reading instruction and an additional 60-minute block for students needing remedial support in reading.
- The fifth component requires that schools assess student reading performance with the Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Given three times a year, student performance on these assessments is analyzed to measure reading performance and growth over time. Student data is also utilized by school-level administrators and teachers as they reflect on student progress, identify student needs, and make instructional decisions that continue to support each student in reaching the 90% reading goal, including child placement in appropriate leveled workshop groups and Reading Mastery intervention groups.
- The sixth component of the Reading Initiative identifies the collaborative efforts in promoting early literacy in young children and providing rich opportunities over the summer to reduce learning loss.

All six of the Reading Initiative components are critical in ensuring that students living in these rural Southern Appalachian communities have access to educational opportunities supported by a strong literacy foundation.

## The Elgin Model of Support

The *Elgin Reading Initiative* developed a comprehensive model to communicate to partner schools the percentage and frequency of support from ECF to the schools (Table 2). This tapering model outlines the consistent funding support provided by ECF in assessing students' reading performance through the thrice yearly MAP assessment. ECF provides additional funding support of curriculum materials, tapering from 80% to 10% between Years One and Four. According to this model, schools that partner with ECF should be prepared to fully fund their curriculum materials by Year Five and focus on "building internal sustainability" with the *Reading Initiative*. Similar to the waning funding of curriculum materials, the Elgin model also notes the transition from full coaching support (8 to 12 visits) in the first two years for school administrators and faculty members to coaching support focusing on developing strategies for program sustainability in the third through sixth years.

**Table 2:** The Elgin Model of Tapering Support

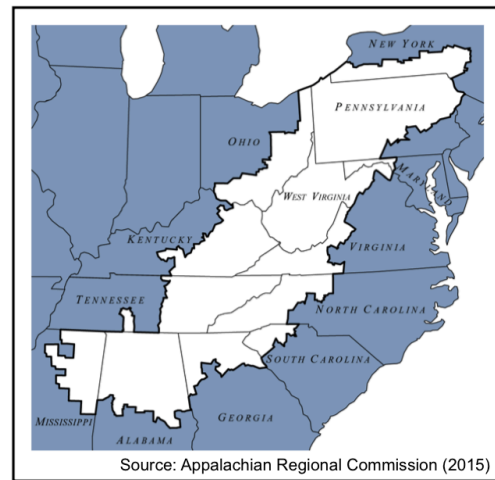
	Curriculum Support	MAP Assessment Support	Coaching Support
Year One	80%	100% (K-5)	Full (classroom and administrative) with 10-12 visits per site
Year Two	50%	100% (K-5)	Full (classroom and administrative) with 8-10 visits per site
Year Three	33.3%	100% (K-5)	Moderate (continue building level coaching and emphasizing internal sustainability with 7-8 visits per site)
Year Four	10%	100% (K-5)	Moderate (continue building level coaching and emphasizing internal sustainability with 5-6 visits per site)
Year Five	0%	100% (K-5)	Limited (focus on building internal sustainability) with 3-4 visits per site
Year Six	0%	100% (K-5)	Limited (focus on building internal sustainability)

Source: Elgin Children's Foundation (2015)

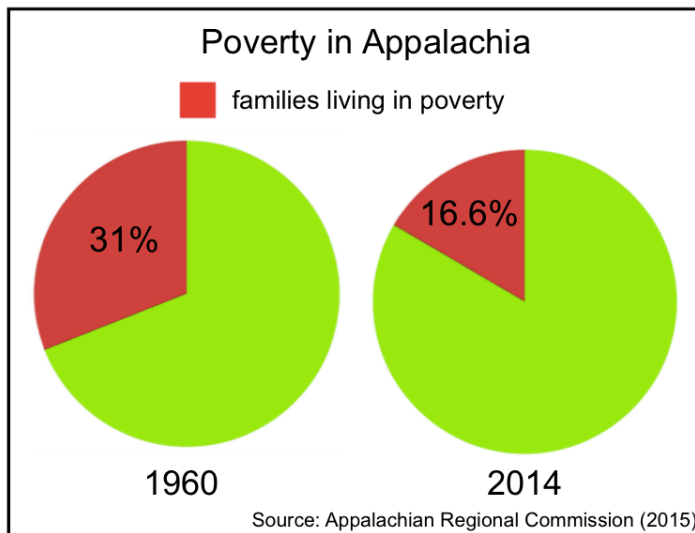
## The Setting: A Portrait of Appalachia

The Appalachia region extends from southern New York to northern Mississippi. Across 420 counties in the 12 states surrounding the Appalachian Mountain range (**Map 1**), this portion of the United States is home to approximately 25 million people (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015). Situated geographically in an area rich with natural resources, in 1964, the Appalachian region provided nearly two-thirds of the nation's coal supply (President's Appalachian Regional Commission, 1964). Up until the mid-20th century, coal mining and agriculture were the most prominent industries in the region. Beginning in the 1950s, these industries saw a decline in employment as job opportunities rose in the manufacturing, construction, and service sectors (PARC, 1964). Such substantial economic challenges led to the 1963 formation of the President's Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC) that published a comprehensive report investigating income disparity, employment opportunities, educational attainment, and housing quality for residents in the region (ARC, 2015). The commission's findings emphasized the dire impact of economic and industrial changes on the lives of people living in Appalachia. Conclusions drawn from the report detailed the need for federal and state support in providing access and resources to the Appalachian region.

**Map 1:** The Appalachian Region



**Figure 1:** Changes in Poverty

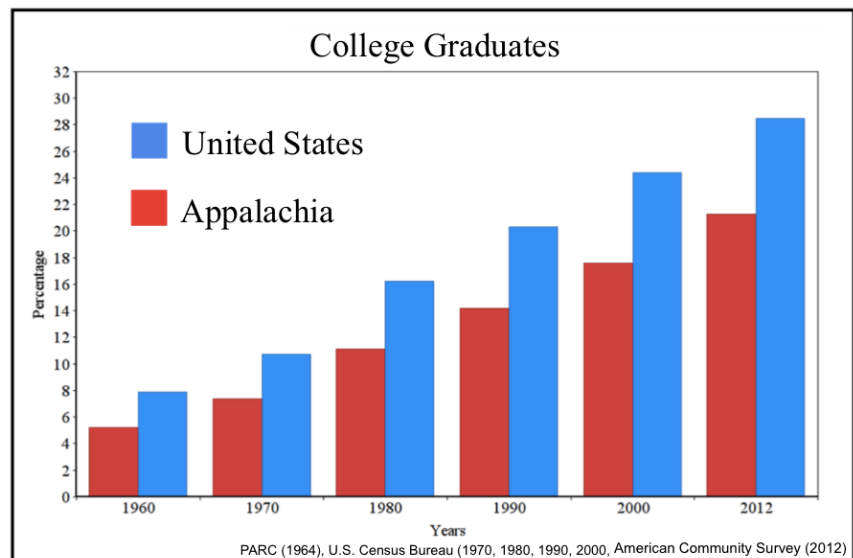


The Appalachian region also saw significant changes in poverty and educational attainment over the past decades. Figure 1 compares the percentages of Appalachian families living in poverty in 1960 and 2014 (ARC, 2015). Nearly half of families living in poverty in 1960 were no longer living in poverty in 2014, as evidenced by a reduction from 31% to 16.6%. In addition to the significant efforts in reducing poverty,

educational attainment has also shown marked improvement. Given that 42% of people in Appalachia live in rural communities, access to education has and continues to be a struggle for families and children in this region (ARC, 2015). In 1960, 11.6% of the Appalachian population had less than a 5th grade education, as compared to 8% of the general population of the United States (PARC, 1964). Disparities are also evident when comparing populations with a high school diploma. In 1960, 41.8% of the general population graduated high school, but that percentage falls to 32.3% for populations living in the Appalachia region (PARC, 1964). Educational attainment beyond high school underscores the greatest disparity between populations living within and outside Appalachia. Figure 2 highlights the changes in the percentage of college graduates between 1960 and 2012.

Although only 5.2% of the population in Appalachia completed college in 1960, it was only 2.7 percent lower than the population of Americans (7.9%) with undergraduate degrees that same year (PARC, 1964). In the decades between 1960 and 2000, significant progress in higher education attainment is evident with graduation rates at 7.4% in 1970, and rising to 17.6% in 2000 (PARC, 1964; ARC, 2015).

**Figure 2: Changes in College Graduates**



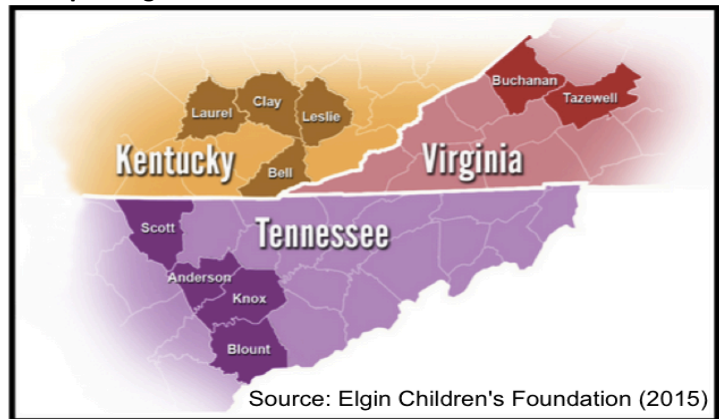
Comparable growth in college graduation rates is seen across the United States with 10.7% graduating in 1970, 16.2% in 1980, 20.3% in 1990, and 24.4% in 2000. By 2012, 21.3% of the Appalachian population acquired a bachelor's degree or higher as compared to 28.5% of the general population (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015). Percentages of students obtaining higher education degrees rose for both populations in Appalachia and beyond, supporting evidence that more students were graduating college in 2012 than in 1960. These increases in graduation rates also draw attention to the growing disparity between educational attainment in the Appalachia region and the rest of the United States. In 1960, the difference between college graduates in Appalachia and the United States was 2.7 percentage points. More than fifty years later, that difference has more

than doubled to 7.2 percentage points. Access to higher education plays a significant role in the life outcomes of students and their families. ECF recognizes this need and dedicates their mission towards supporting the current challenges and future goals of Appalachian children.

***A Portrait of the Counties Served by the Elgin Children’s Foundation***

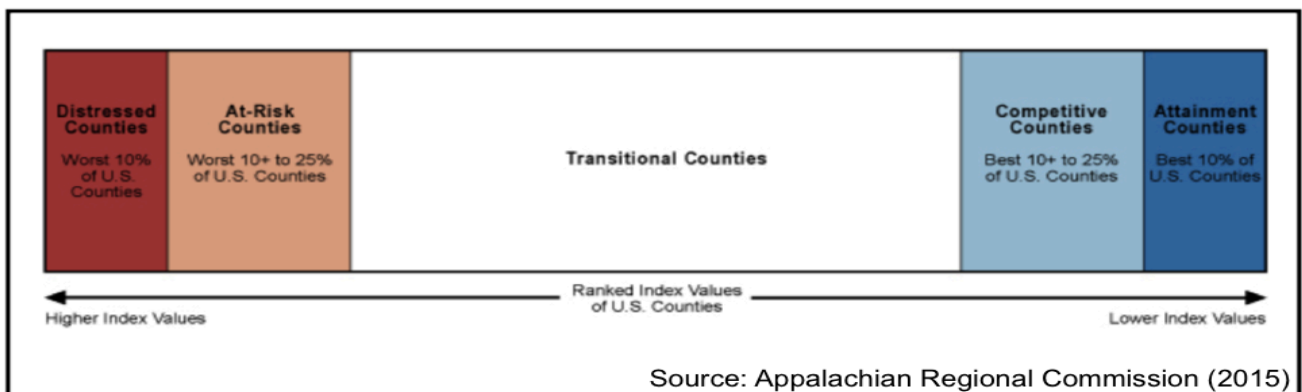
The Elgin Children’s Foundation serves children living in the rural communities of Southern Appalachia. Its mission statement directs the Foundation to work towards encouraging habits of lifetime wellness, educating children to become lifelong learners, and empowering communities to create and provide environments where children flourish and mature into productive citizens. Partnerships

**Map 2: Elgin Service Counties**



between ECF and ten counties across three different states prioritize service to the youngest, the poorest, the most vulnerable, and the rurally isolated populations of Southern Appalachia. **Map 2** shows the ten counties that have formed partnerships with ECF. These counties, along with hundreds of other counties in Appalachia, are monitored by the Appalachian Regional Commission in an effort to identify areas of economic distress. Averages for three economic indicators (unemployment, per capita income, and poverty) are compared with national averages to create a composite index value that is ranked along a five-tier classification system (ARC, 2016). Figure 3 illustrates the economic status designation using the index value rankings.

**Figure 3: Economic Status Designation Index**



Counties in the highest 10 percent of the nation are considered “attainment counties” due to low three-year average unemployment rates, high per capita market income, and low poverty rates. On the opposite end of the classification system are the “distressed counties” with significantly higher unemployment and poverty rates and lower per capita income. According to data provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission for the 2016 fiscal year, 40% of the counties served by ECF are classified as “distressed”, 20% classified as “at-risk”, and 40% classified as “transitional” (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Economic Status of ECF Counties**

County	3-Year Average Unemployment Rate (2011-13)	Per Capita Income (2013)	Poverty Rate (2009-2013)	Economic Status (2016)
Bell (KY)	13.7%	\$14,728	33.5%	Distressed
Clay (KY)	13.3%	\$12,997	37.7%	Distressed
Laurel (KY)	9.8%	\$19,842	21.8%	At-risk
Leslie (KY)	14.7%	\$13,818	22.6%	Distressed
Anderson (TN)	8.1%	\$29,990	18.2%	Transitional
Blount (TN)	7.2%	\$27,212	13.7%	Transitional
Knox (TN)	6.7%	\$34,301	14.6%	Transitional
Scott (TN)	18.3%	\$14,855	28.3%	Distressed
Buchanan (VA)	8.5%	\$24,888	25.9%	At-risk
Tazewell (VA)	7.0%	\$24,021	18.3%	Transitional

Source: Appalachian Regional Commission (2015)

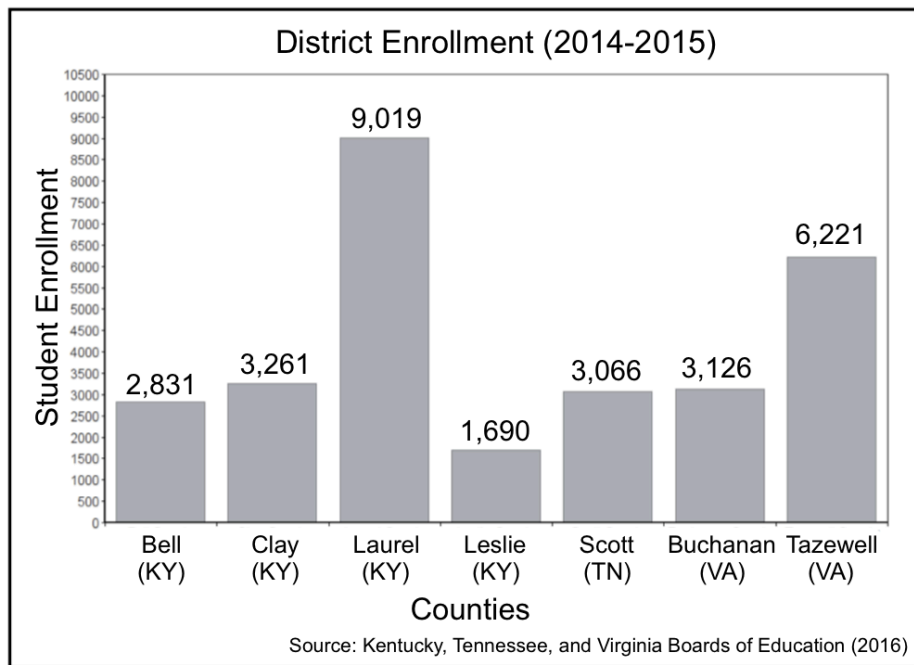


When analyzing the ten counties in partnership with ECF, it is evident that the “distressed counties” are burdened with the highest unemployment and poverty rates in comparison to the “at-risk” and “transitional” counties. In addition, these “distressed” counties also have significantly lower per capita income, indicating the cumulative effect of job loss on poverty.

Three of these distressed counties are located in eastern Kentucky and one in eastern Tennessee. Aside from Scott County (TN), the other counties in Tennessee and Virginia are classified as “at risk” or “transitional” due to lower unemployment and poverty rates and higher per capita income. These data sets lend a perspective on the economic realities and challenges facing the families and children living in these counties.

*Breaking the Cycle: The Elgin Foundation Academic Reading Initiative* was developed to improve early literacy in young children living in several Appalachian counties across Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. The *Initiative* works with seven counties across three different states towards improving early literacy in young children. Four of

**Figure 4: District Enrollment at Seven Elgin Counties (2014-2015)**



these counties are located in southeastern Kentucky, one county located in eastern Tennessee, and two counties located in western Virginia. While these counties share similar economic challenges, they vary in size as calculated by the number of students enrolled in school from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade in 2014 (Figure 4). Although these enrollment numbers range from 1,690 students in Leslie County (KY) to 9,019 students in Laurel County (KY), many of these districts have not experienced wide enrollment changes over the last five years. Table 4 presents changes in enrollment for each of these districts between 2010 and 2015.

**Table 4: District Enrollment Between 2009 and 2015**

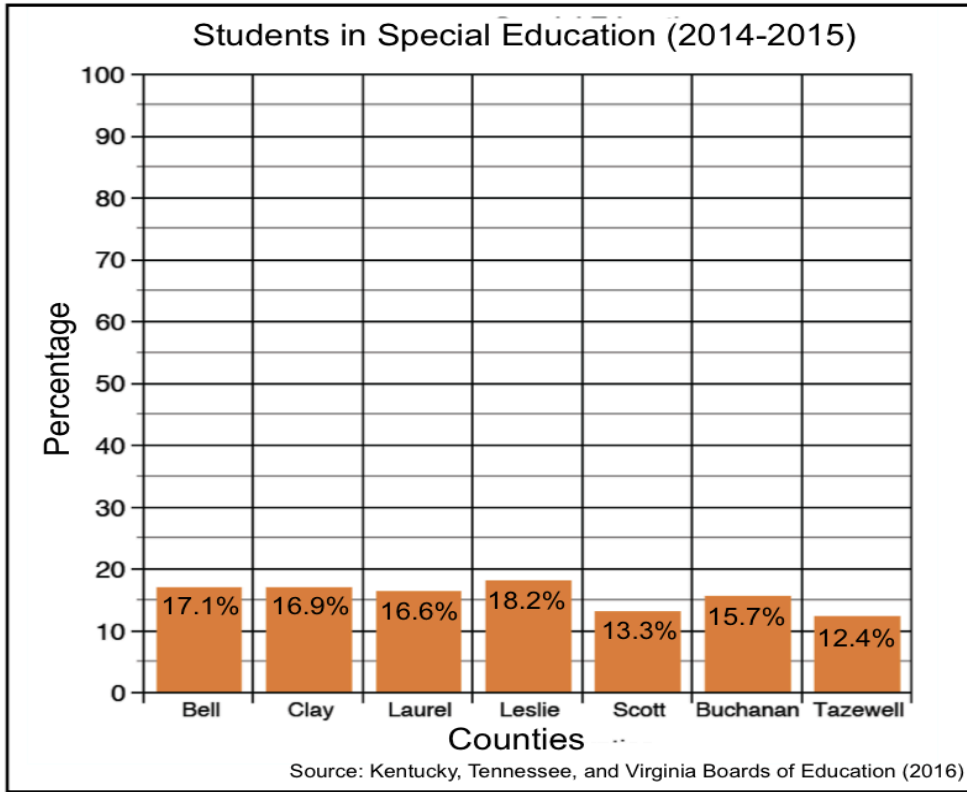
School Year	Bell (KY)	Clay (KY)	Laurel (KY)	Leslie (KY)	Scott (TN)	Buchanan (VA)	Tazewell (VA)
'09 - '10	2924	3441	9121	1745	2744	3386	6787
'10 - '11	2872	3379	9183	1739	2850	3333	6623
'11 - '12	2881	3321	9136	1731	2837	3310	6552
'12 - '13	2882	3309	9053	1768	3117	3281	6464
'13 - '14	2863	3267	9053	1723	3085	3201	6345
'14 - '15	2831	3261	9019	1690	3066	3126	6221

Source: Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia Boards of Education (2016)

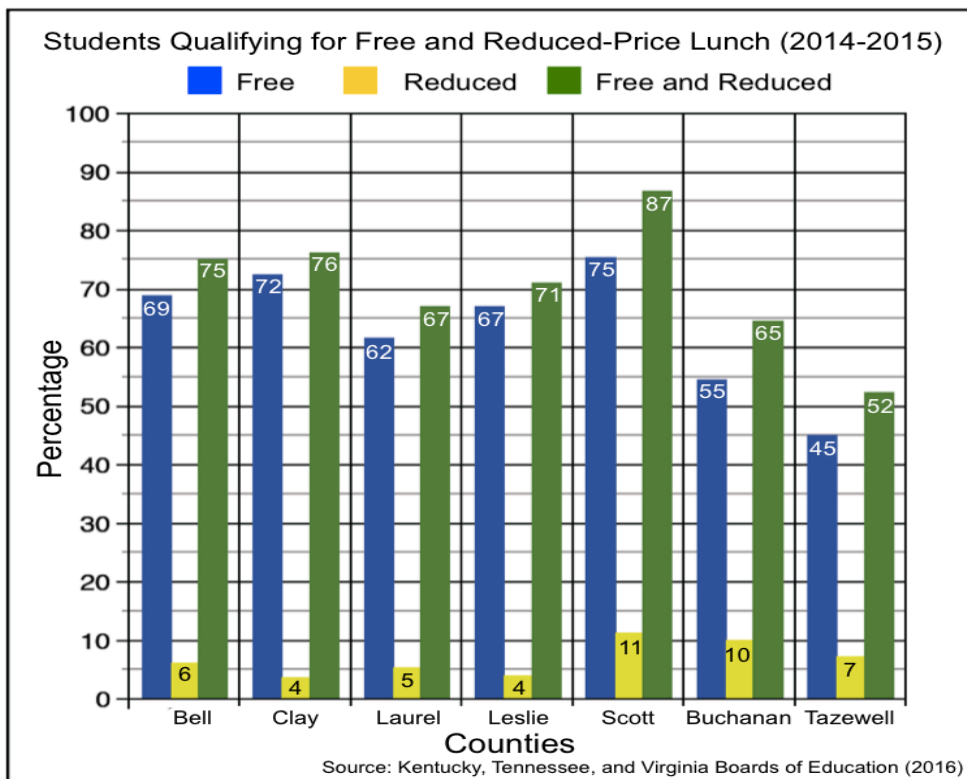
While Scott County (TN) saw an 11.7% increase in enrollment from 2,744 students in the fall of 2009 to 3,066 students just five years later, all other counties experienced lower enrollments over the same period. Buchanan and Tazewell Counties in Virginia lost 7.7% and 8.3% of their student population, respectively. The remaining four counties in Kentucky also enrolled fewer students, losing between 1.1% and 5.2% of their enrollment by 2014.

Figures 5 and 6 compare district demographics related to enrollment for students with special education needs as well as economically disadvantaged students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. Among all of the schools that partner with the Elgin Children's Foundation, the average percentage of students with disabilities is 15.7% with Leslie County (KY) enrolling the highest (18.2%) and Scott County (TN) the lowest percentages (13.3%). These percentages are significantly lower than the percentages of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL).

**Figure 5: Students in Special Education (2014-2015)**



**Figure 6: Students Qualifying for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (2014-2015)**



Scott County (86.8%) and Clay County (76.2%) share the highest FRPL percentages while Tazewell County (52.4%) has the lowest FRPL percentage. The average FRPL percentage across these districts is 70.4%, indicating nearly three quarters of a school's student population qualify for free and reduced priced lunch.

## ***A Portrait of the Schools Implementing the Elgin Reading Initiative: Our Sample***

The Elgin Reading Initiative serves thousands of children from Kindergarten through third grade across 43 rural elementary schools. Clustered in the interior regions of central Appalachia, these schools share similar school demographics that speak to the economic challenges and the educational needs of its student population. For the purposes of this study, we chose to select six schools to visit for observations and interviews. Table 5 reveals profiles of the six schools located in six different counties across Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Table 5: School Profiles (2014-2015)

<b>School A: Bell County (KY)</b> Enrollment: 562 Grades: PreK-8 Population: 98% White Free/Reduced Lunch: 71.3% Special Ed: 19.4%	<b>School B: Tazewell County</b> Enrollment: 442 Grades: PreK-5 Population: 99.3% White Free/Reduced Lunch: 47.9% Special Ed: 9.7%	<b>School C: Clay County (KY)</b> Enrollment: 501 Grades: PreK-6 Population: 93.6% White/2.8% Black Free/Reduced Lunch: 74.7% Special Ed: 18%
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<b>School D: Scott County (TN)</b> Enrollment: 599 Grades: PreK-5 Population: 97.3% White Free/Reduced Lunch: 71.4% Special Ed: 11.5%	<b>School E: Tazewell County</b> Enrollment: 542 Grades: PreK-5 Population: 88.6% White/5.2% Black Free/Reduced Lunch: 53.9% Special Ed: 12.9%	<b>School F: Leslie County (KY)</b> Enrollment: 211 Grades: PreK-8 Population: 98.6% White Free/Reduced Lunch: 70.1% Special Ed: 16.1%
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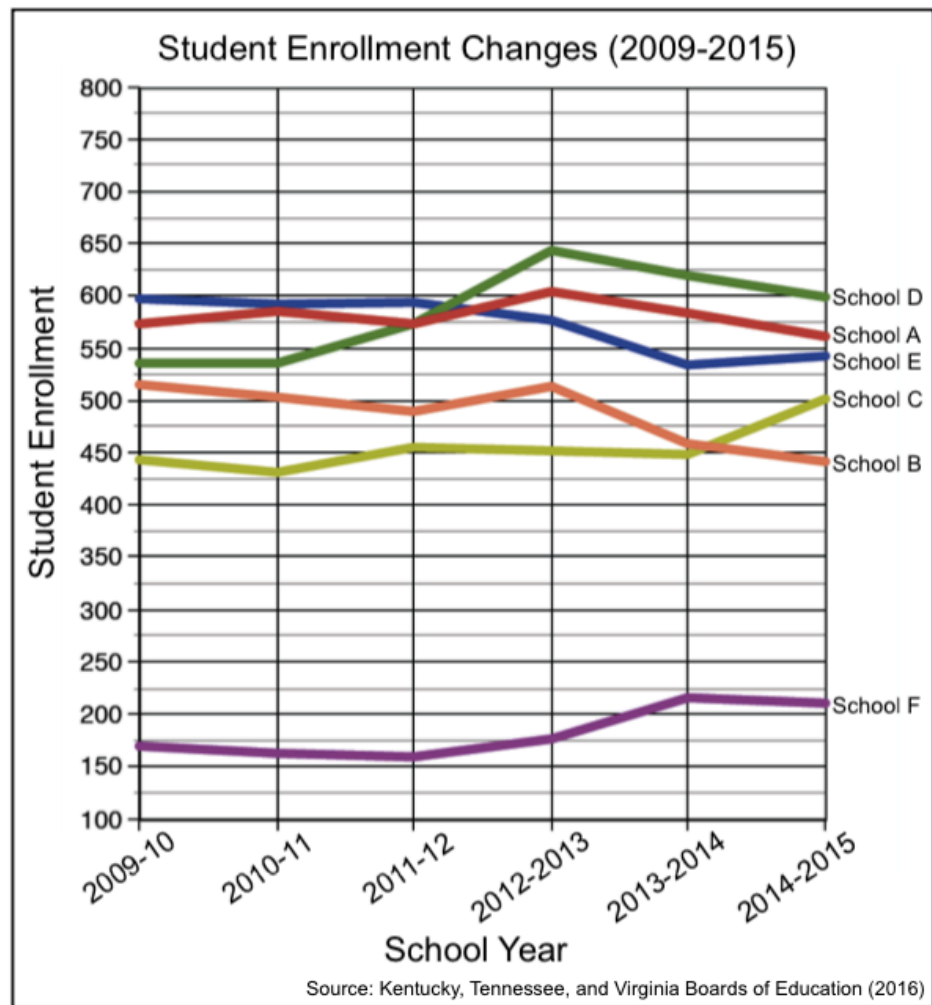
Source: Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia Boards of Education (2016)

Based on the data presented in Table 5, School F is the smallest in size with an enrollment of 211 students as compared to School D with 599 students enrolled in the fall of 2014. Half of these schools serve students through the fifth grade while the other half extend into the middle grades. Reflective of the Appalachian region in which these schools are situated, the majority of the student population is White and at least half to three quarters of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

**Figure 7** presents student enrollment data between 2009 and 2015. With varying degrees, student enrollment fluctuated during years prior to and throughout the *Elgin Reading Initiative*. The most significant changes to enrollment were present for Schools B, C, and D. At School B, student enrollment fell steadily from 516 students in the year before the launch to 504 and 490 students in Years One and Two of the *Reading Initiative*, respectively. Aside from a brief influx of 23 new students in Year Three, School B continued to see a decline in school enrollment in Years Four (458 students) and Five (442 students), marking a 14.3% drop in enrollment between 2009 and 2014.

Schools C and D both saw notable changes in student enrollment with an additional 58 students (13.3% increase) for School C and 64 new students (10.1% increase) between 2009 and 2014. Such increases in enrollment during the course of the *Elgin Reading Initiative* impacts class size and the various systems and structures necessary for an effective instructional program. Similar to Schools C and D, School F also

underwent enrollment changes during its partnership with ECF. Beginning in 2009 with an enrollment of 170, School F finished its fifth year with an enrollment of 211 students, adding nearly a quarter of its student population throughout the *Elgin Reading Initiative*.



## ***A Look at the Individual Schools***

### ***Kentucky Schools***

#### *School A (Bell County)*

School A is one of six elementary schools located in Bell County, Kentucky. For the 2014-2015 school year, School A enrolled 562 students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade with an average of 62 students for each of its lower elementary grades (K-3). Of the student population at School A, 98% identified as White, 64.2% qualified for free lunch, 7.1% qualified for reduced-price lunch, and 19.4% received special education services. There were 48 teachers employed at School A with an average of 12.3 years of teaching experience (KYDOE, 2016). The principal of School A has been at the helm for over a decade and played a significant role during the onboarding process with the Elgin Reading Initiative in 2010.

#### *School C (Clay County)*

To the north of Bell County lies Clay County, Kentucky. It is the second of four counties that launched the *Elgin Reading Initiative* in its elementary schools. The county's larger square mileage is home to one preschool, seven elementary schools, and three middle/high schools. In the fall of 2014, School C enrolled 501 students of which 93.6% identified as White with the remaining population identifying as African-American, Hispanic, or multi-racial. From this student population, 69.1% qualified for free lunch, 5.6% qualified for reduced-price lunch, and 18% received special education services. School C employs 31 teachers who have an average of 14.7 years of teaching experience (KYDOE, 2016). Both the principal and the instructional coach have been at School C for over three decades. Their collaboration with the Elgin coaches and their consistent efforts in developing teachers were the hallmark of School C's efforts towards improving early literacy with the *Elgin Reading Initiative*.

#### *School F (Leslie County)*

The third Kentucky school is located in Leslie County, Kentucky. This is a small county with only four PreK-8 schools, one 7-12 school, and one high school. Similar to the demographics of the region, student racial identity at School F is predominantly White (98.6%) with a small fraction of African-American (0.9%) and Asian students (0.5%). Less than twenty percent of the student population received special education services (16.1%) during the 2014-2015 school year and a greater portion qualified for free lunch (70.1%). School F is the smallest of the six schools we visited, with only 211 students and 14 faculty members. In comparison to the other two schools in Kentucky,

School F has had leadership changes over course of the school's partnership with ECF. Three years after the launch of the *Elgin Reading Initiative* in the fall of 2010, a new principal assumed leadership of School F. Many of the systems and structures established by this new principal helped School F attain considerable growth in student reading performance.

### ***Tennessee Schools***

#### ***School D (Scott County)***

Scott County, Tennessee is located south of the Kentucky-Tennessee border. With an enrollment of 599 students in the fall of 2014, School D is the largest of the six elementary schools visited for this capstone project. In spite of its size, School D has a smaller population of students needing special education services (11.5%) but a large percentage of students eligible for free (59.3%) and reduced-price lunch (12.1%). Similar to other elementary schools in the Appalachian region, the vast majority of the students (97.3%) at School D identify as White. School D experienced a leadership change at the start of the *Elgin Reading Initiative* with a new principal whose role and responsibilities impacted the effectiveness of the reading program.

### ***Virginia Schools***

#### ***School B (Tazewell County)***

Fifteen schools are spread out across Tazewell County, Virginia. Of these schools, 8 are elementary schools, 4 are middle schools, and 3 are high schools. School B served 442 students from PreKindergarten through fifth grade during the 2014-2015 school year, 99.3% of whom identified as White. Nearly half (47.9%) of the student population qualify for free and reduced-price lunch and nearly a tenth (9.7%) receive special education services.

#### ***School E (Tazewell County)***

Like School B, School E also serves students from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade with comparable percentages of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch (53.9%). School E has a higher enrollment with 542 students and a greater percentage of students who need special education services (12.9%). School E also has a slightly more diverse student population with 88.6% identifying as White while the remaining 11.4% of the students at identify as African-American, Asian, or multi-racial.

## METHODS

Our project design utilized a mixed approach of field research and grounded theory methodologies. These qualitative methods are valuable because they “privilege information from the subjects of study” in order to build theories to respond to social problems (Smith, 2002). The main thrust of our capstone study focuses on the implementation, efficacy, and sustainability of the Elgin reading initiative in seven partner school districts. We designed our project around three questions:

1. How was the literacy program implemented across schools? How, and to what extent, has literacy instruction changed as a result of the Elgin reading reform effort?
2. What do implementation patterns indicate regarding the impact on school culture and student achievement?
3. What factors (including human capital, financial, organizational, leadership) influence the long-term sustainability of the program?

### **Qualitative data collection and analysis**

Our capstone began with phone conversations with the client in order to get a better sense of the Elgin Children’s Foundation’s (ECF) aspirations for the study of the reading program. We also visited the client’s offices where we learned how its reading programs fit within its larger scope of work, which includes pediatric dental care, Bible release time for area public schools, and partnerships supporting early childhood learning. These conversations were vital in that they afforded our team with the background on how the Foundation began its work in schools and how the dental program complimented the reading reforms. They also gave us a preliminary outline of the six programmatic changes that compose the Elgin reading initiative:

1. Adoption of the 90% reading goal;
2. Implementation of research based reading curriculum;
3. Professional development;
4. Schedule changes;
5. Shared literacy assessments; &
6. Early childhood programming.



ECF previously commissioned several quantitative reports on the effectiveness of their reading programming, including an Education Strategies Consulting report, Education Consumers Foundation report, and a Battelle Final Elgin Foundation report. Additionally, the client's own doctoral dissertation provided a quantitative analysis on ECF's reading programming. Each of these reports and analyses were made available to our capstone team. Given the robust nature of the foregoing quantitative analysis, the client requested that our team provide a qualitative analysis of the reading initiative. Paired with the existing quantitative data, our capstone aims to capture a more complete picture of the human dimensions that shaped the implementation and that will support or inhibit its sustainability at the end of Elgin funding.

Following the initial client visit, we also scheduled an informal school visit in order to observe the literacy program and its components in action. The daylong site visit and informal conversations with teachers and staff assisted in the development of our interview protocols and the teacher survey and also built contextual understanding of the schools served by the program, their student population, and the components of the reading program. From these visits, we were also able to build our conceptual framework to include the following major areas of extant literature: philanthropy in K-12 education, program implementation, and program sustainability.

### ***Interview protocols***

We designed four interview protocols for each of the different groups who would serve as key informants for the study including teachers, principals, district administrators, and ECF coaches. Working from the conceptual framework, we designed each question of our interviews to address the following topics: areas of the program's implementation and the fidelity of the implementation, perceptions of the impact on student achievement and school culture, and sustainability of the program after the conclusion of ECF involvement and funding.

The interview protocol for principals asked about the school context, implementation, and the principal's work with the ECF principal/data coach. The ECF coach interview protocol also followed the conceptual framework, but focused on their working interactions with teachers and principals as a mechanism to illuminate implementation practices. *A copy of the interview protocols is provided in Appendix D.*

## ***School Site Selection***

We utilized purposive sampling methods in order to select the six elementary school sites in which to conduct interviews and observations. In consultation with our capstone advisor, we analyzed the common reading assessment data (Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Program or MAP test) provided by ECF and ranked schools on the basis of their growth on these assessments, in order to include both schools which had made strong gains and those who had shown declines (in one or more grades) during the program. From conversations with the client, we also ascertained schools that ECF considered “exemplars” and schools that were classified as “non-performers.” The study includes schools in both categories as a form of deviant case sampling in order to obtain the broadest perspective about implementation successes and challenges. We also sought geographic representation of the three states in which the Elgin Reading Initiative operates (Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia).

## ***Observations***

Our team conducted observations during the six school visits in order to triangulate our data from teacher interviews and surveys. The observations involved the following aspects of instruction and school culture:

- Heterogeneous whole group instruction;
- Differentiated small group reading workshops;
- Reading Mastery remedial reading instruction;
- Transitions between reading interventions;
- Teachers’ use of hand gestures, cues, and curricular materials/manuals;
- Teachers’ pacing during the lesson cycle;
- Student engagement level during the lesson cycle;
- Data tracking charts displaying student performance on MAP assessments; &
- School based signage supporting a culture of reading.

The team built inter-rater reliability with their observations by visiting classrooms and schools in pairs and debriefing each classroom. The observations also buttress the data from the teacher survey in that they provided an on the ground confirmation of the five programmatic elements and the presence of visible data tracking charts and supportive messages about literacy.

### ***Selection of Interviewees***

For our project, we interviewed 55 key informants working within the ECF partner schools: 45 teachers or paraprofessionals, 6 principals/school administrators, 2 district administrators, and 2 ECF literacy coaches.

**Table 6:** School-based Interviews

<b>School</b>	<b>Student Enrollment 2014-2015</b>	<b># Teachers/ Paraprofessionals Interviewed</b>
School A	562 students	6
School B	442 students	5
School C	501 students	17
School D	599 students	7
School E	542 students	5
School F	211 students	4

In order to garner the fullest perspective on implementation of the *Elgin Reading Initiative*, our team chose to interview a sample of K-3rd grade teachers and paraprofessionals, principals, district administrators, and ECF literacy coaches. We relied on criterion sampling methods for the teacher interviews to ensure that our interview samples were representative of grade level teachers within each K-3 band. For instance, in low enrollment schools within the sample with only a single classroom per grade, all K-3 teachers were interviewed; whereas in larger enrollment schools, two or more teachers in each grade level from kindergarten through third grade were interviewed. No teachers who were not primarily reading teachers (i.e. physical educators, music teachers, or other personnel providing less than 1 hour of reading instruction or remediation) or teaching fourth grade or higher were included in the interviews. Each principal in the school sample was interviewed.

Two current Elgin reading coaches were also interviewed (representing a third of coaching staff). These coaches were selected through convenience sampling based

on their ability to attend a web-based conference call with the capstone team.

More specifically, our team utilized semi-standardized, open-ended interviews at each of the six school sites. This process provided a consistent method for asking questions to our participants and ensured a greater degree of reliability among our team. We also conducted our first interviews in pairs with one team member leading the interview and the other taking notes on the interaction, interjecting occasionally to probe where follow up might be appropriate, keeping track of time and interview pacing, and sharing feedback at the conclusion of the interview. Our use of semi-standardized, open-ended interviews also facilitated the increased efficiency of our data coding and analysis process as each of the questions linked directly to a construct within the conceptual framework.

Our teacher and principal interviews were each conducted as individual interviews. We chose to interview these key informants separately to discern their own personal perceptions of the ECF reading program and its impacts. Given time and scheduling constraints, the district administrator and ECF literacy coach interviews were completed in pairs with the administrator interview occurring in-person and the Elgin coach interview occurring through a web video conference call.

### ***Interview Data Analysis***

Our capstone team completed 53 in person interviews and one paired interview utilizing a video web conference. Each of these interviews was audio recorded and later transcribed to provide a detailed and verbatim account. Additionally, the team kept focused notes during the interviews to capture key phrases and terms and also to summarize informant responses. Transcription of the interviews by the team provided an immersive and reflective period prior to the structured analysis of this data. Immediately following transcription, each team member re-read their individual interviews and identified illustrative quotations.

The team utilized a multi-phase content analysis approach to coding the transcripts. This inductive process allowed us first to locate emerging patterns and themes in the transcripts. Each of the emerging themes was then uplifted to assist in a second reading of the transcripts in which the themes received a separate color-coding to denote their

presence in the interview record. The process of open coding is described as an “analytic process through which concepts are identified and their dimensions are discovered in data” (Patton 2002, p. 10). Finally, the coded transcripts were brought together to complete a separate matrix for each school site in the sample and a research matrix representing the collective interviews. The use of school site matrixes allowed our team to more effectively delineate trends across schools and also to contrast the implementation and efficacy approaches between schools. *A sample of the research matrix used in our analysis is provided in Appendix A.*

An unanticipated benefit of our qualitative interviewing approach was the extent to which the interviews elicited vivid stories about key moments in the implementation of the ECF project. These narratives provided rich elaborations beyond our teacher survey data into the day-to-day interactions between ECF personnel and school staff. These stories were also shared in a conversational and colloquial language common to the Appalachian region, which we attempt to capture later in the language of our capstone findings and throughout this study. Storytelling is a valuable qualitative method which “can be integrated into ongoing program evaluation, monitoring, and development (organizational learning) processes” (Patton 2002, p. 196). Its use here provides a contextual flavor that deepens understanding of this complex region and of our findings.

The iterative process of reviewing the data and completing the research matrices revealed emergent patterns and relationships. These patterns helped our team make sense of the data and ground our understandings of the ECF reading program implementation, its perceived effectiveness, and the likelihood of partner schools to continue these reforms.

## **Quantitative data collection and analysis**

As aforementioned, our capstone client provided student reading achievement data for each participating elementary school as well as external quantitative reports and program evaluations. Given the wealth of existing quantitative data, our team focused our collection efforts on the few remaining gaps in the data record. We designed a teacher survey for the following purposes:

1. To supplement the existing student reading performance data with teacher perception data on the ECF reading program’s effectiveness;
2. To triangulate findings and perceptions between the teacher survey group

(N=205;59% of the ECF partnership teacher population) and the teachers interviewed in the sample (N=45) on program implementation, especially literacy coaching;

3. To collect information on teacher demographic characteristics (i.e. years of teaching experience overall and within current placement school); and
4. To ascertain the extent to which teachers are aware of the programmatic elements.

***Designing our teacher survey***

**Table 7: Teacher Survey Response by School District**

<b>School District</b>	<b>Teacher Responses</b>
Bell County (KY)	41
Clay County (KY)	13
Laurel County (KY)	51
Leslie County (KY)	19
Oneida Special (TN)	14
Buchanan County (VA)	18
Tazewell County (VA)	49
<b>Totals</b>	<b>N = 205</b>

The teacher survey was designed as a quantitative tool to gather information about the ECF partner elementary schools. Our anonymous survey was administered concurrently with the start of the school interview phase. It was disseminated electronically to school district officials designated by the client as the primary contacts within the district. These leaders then distributed the surveys to teachers and principals within the 45 participating ECF elementary schools, with a response rate of 59%. The survey was developed utilizing independently validated questions, including demographic questions from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational

Statistics annual Teacher Survey and the Aspen Institute's study on the efficacy of teacher evaluations (Weiner & Lundy, 2013). The Aspen study examined the efficacy of teacher evaluation systems and engaged teachers on their perceptions of coaching and supports relative to the implementation of new statewide or district teacher evaluation systems. This instrument was selected because of our interest in understanding the role of reading coaches in the implementation of the ECF effort. More specifically, these items inquire about the frequency of ECF coach observations, the frequency of feedback from coaches, the quality of feedback provided by coaches, and the extent to which coaching contributed to greater teacher efficacy and student performance.

The demographic questions pertain to teacher characteristics such as years of teaching experience and within the placement school and class configuration (self contained classroom, small group pull-out, or team teaching arrangement). The eighteen-item survey was designed to take between 15-20 minutes and provided valuable information about the implementation of the ECF reading reforms in each school.

For the purposes of the teacher surveys, five of the six program components are included, excluding summer school and pre-kindergarten programming. This was done strategically because ECF program staff informed our team that these programs were implemented inconsistently and often in partnership with community faith-based organizations outside of the purview of their elementary school partners. Questions on the ECF programmatic components ascertained teacher's knowledge of each component and their perceptions about the *Imagine It!* reading curriculum in meeting students' reading needs.

### **Limitations of the project design**

Our interview methodology employed a semi-structured interview protocol. At a minimum, we can ensure that all informants were asked a core set of questions. However, both a benefit and drawback of this approach is that it allowed our team the flexibility to ask appropriate follow up questions or to deviate from the protocol when team members deemed appropriate. While this approach opened up new lines of inquiry, it also contributes to a threat to validity as not all participants were asked the same questions. Additionally, we cannot know how answers to these additional, non-standardized follow up questions may have contributed to other questions down the line.

For the teacher interviews, our team utilized non-random criterion sampling. The use of a non-random sampling method was not ideal given that our participating principals

played a heavy role in the selection of teacher informants. While we were very clear in identifying and achieving a sample with a broad level of teaching experience and grade level placements, the reliance on principals in coordinating our teacher interview schedules introduces the threat of selection bias in which the principal may select teachers with shared opinions about ECF programming and shield or exclude other teacher voices.

The teacher surveys were distributed by our district lead contacts to the principals and teachers. These district contacts were provided by ECF. In some cases, the principals received our request to participate in the survey and then forwarded to teachers. The high level of mediation between our team, district leads, and then principals to teachers meant that our contact with teachers was indirect. Unfortunately, we were not able to secure teachers' email addresses to make more direct contact. In order to alleviate any concerns for teachers and to ensure their anonymous and candid participation, we carefully crafted an email that introduced our team and the independent capstone study. This email could then be forwarded with minimal need for additional explanatory language by principals or district staff. Additionally, the team provided biweekly updates on school response rates to the district contacts during the survey period leading to participation at 40 of the 45 ECF partner schools. *A sample copy of the Teacher Email Invitation to Participate in the ECF Teacher Survey is included in Appendix B.*

A final concern is that the teacher survey included several items with a 5-point Likert scale. These questions asked teachers to rate the effectiveness of their ECF literacy coaches on a variety of measures. For these ten survey questions, a significant percentage of respondents, between 20-25%, selected the response "Neither Agree or Disagree" even though the questions were fairly straightforward and a neutral response might seem inappropriate. For instance, one question asks teachers to rate the extent to which ECF coaches provided "specific resources... to help me learn and grow in the areas identified in my observation feedback." The researchers postulate that social desirability bias may be at work in these responses as most teachers are hesitant to speak ill of the Elgin program given its philanthropic giving to their schools and a neutral response is a safer way to register disagreement (Fisher 1993). In the interviews, teachers repeatedly couched their critiques of the program implementation with language about Elgin being "such a blessing." A remedy to this potential bias would be to utilize a 4-point Likert scale, thereby eliminating the option of the neutral response. *See Appendices C and E, respectively.*



## FINDINGS

*Question 1: How was the literacy program implemented across schools? How, and to what extent, has literacy instruction changed as a result of the Elgin reading reform effort? (fidelity)*

### *Fidelity to Program Components*

In our visits to the six selected schools, we had the opportunity to not only interview teachers and administrators, but also spend several hours in classrooms observing reading instruction. Over the course of six days, we saw whole group heterogeneous instruction, small group homogeneous workshops, and intervention groups from grades K-3 in each school.

Although there were nuanced differences between the schools' implementation of the program, such as group size, personnel utilization, and transition management, overall we observed a high level of fidelity to the program implementation. In fact, we saw the same lessons being taught, the same stories being read, and the same instructional language and cues being utilized across the six schools during our week of travel. Teachers were following the *Imagine It!* and *Reading Mastery* curriculums "to the letter," typically cradling the teacher's manuals under their arms as they circulated around the room or firmly holding them on their laps as they led a whole group session on the rug.

In the teacher surveys, teachers expressed high levels of support for the *Imagine It!* reading curriculum and its efficacy in preparing grade level readers. The program was believed to be effective by 75% of teachers. A small majority of respondents believed that the *Imagine It!* curriculum offers adequate opportunities for differentiation, an important research-supported strategy for early readers. Nearly one-third of respondents expressed ambivalence or disagreement that the *Imagine It!* program supported differentiation.

Also in the surveys, teachers confirmed that their schools have adopted the two hour morning reading block (94%). The uniformity of this practice was validated in both observations and teacher interviews at the school sites. A very small minority of teachers indicated that their schools had not adopted the two hour block, concentrated in a single school district (Bell County). Teachers also confirmed their fidelity to the one hour intervention block, which they called "workshop". These small group workshops were leveled based on student reading ability and often meant teachers would receive similarly situated students from across the grade level.

As we began our interviews with teachers, we found that teachers' understandings of some of the other aspects of the Reading Initiative were incomplete or variable among schools. We saw evidence of this as well in our surveys. The finding that rose to the surface immediately was the teachers' ambiguous understanding of the 90% reading goal. As a central tenet of the Kennesaw program, and the stated goal of the ECF program, it was surprising to hear such inconsistent understanding across schools and grades as to what the goal meant. Interestingly, the third grade teachers interviewed seemed to have the clearest understanding of the goal: that 90% of third grade students read on "grade level" or score "proficient" as represented by attaining the 50th percentile or higher. Other grade level teachers held multiple misinterpretations, including the following:

- 100% of K-3 children need to score 90% on the MAP assessment;
- Children needed to be within the 90th percentile; and
- Every grade level should reach the 90% goal.

This was also reflected in our surveys, as 20% of teachers answered "Don't Know" to the question if their school had adopted the 90% goal. These teachers represented a broad range of years of experience, including 43% with 11 or more years experience in their school placement, indicating they had been in the school for the duration of the program implementation.

### *ECF Reading Coaches*

The influence of the ECF reading coaches was a discussion point that arose immediately and continued in our conversations with teachers and principals about the level of fidelity in the implementation. Most teachers spoke highly of their experience with the coaches, many speaking quite fondly of one particular coach who had recently passed away from cancer. The coaches themselves described their role as "building trust and holding (the teachers') hands." The coaches' practices of modeling, positive feedback with gentle critiques, and targeted observations were all pointed to as reasons for both implementation success and fidelity to the program. The one consistent criticism from teachers (and acknowledged by the coaches) was inconsistency in the expectations and feedback among the coaches themselves, as schools transitioned to different coaches as the years passed.

This was further reflected in the teacher survey data, as teachers expressed a strong belief in the expertise of their ECF coaches. Teachers also felt that the coaches worked to share their strengths during observation debriefs as well as highlighting areas

for growth. A large proportion of teachers, however, indicated that advice between coaches was sometimes inconsistent. They also expressed that coaches gave advice that was inconsistent with feedback offered by their principals. Interestingly, a number of respondents (nearly a quarter) indicated a “neither agree or disagree” response to these questions related to the consistency of feedback between ECF coaches. The researchers postulate that social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993) may be at work in these responses as most teachers were hesitant to speak ill of the ECF program given its philanthropic giving to their schools and use neutral responses as a safer way to register disagreement.

Digging deeper into these initial findings, key themes arose from this question of fidelity of program implementation, and the resulting impact on reading instruction for teachers. To further explore these themes, we identified key quotes from our interviews and trends from the teacher survey data to describe and inform our understanding of the findings, a structure that we will employ with the other two project questions as well.

### *That’s Above My Pay Grade: The Tension with Top-down Decision Making*

As demonstrated in the ambiguous understanding of the 90% goal by teachers, the implementation of the *Elgin Reading Initiative* created some missed opportunities for promoting buy-in and understanding of goals for teachers. Following the Kennewick model, ECF focused on the adoption the 90% reading goal at the district level by superintendents and school boards. However, the communication of that specific goal and its purpose broke down from the district level to the school level. Without a clear understanding of the primary goal, the ability to create buy-in for teachers to implement a new curriculum, schedule, and assessment was significantly hindered.

At the time we interviewed teachers and principals (Fall 2015), the program had been implemented in schools between 4-6 years. As reflected in both the teacher interviews and the coach interviews, it took between 2-3 years for teachers to understand the content and pedagogy of the new curriculum, for principals to understand the data management and scheduling aspects, and for districts to see some initial gains. As one teacher stated, “by the fourth year it made sense,” and the coaches agreed that “the third year was the breakthrough.” Two to three years is a significant portion of an elementary student’s education, especially in an intervention focused on the first four years, K-3rd grade. The question that arises is “Why did the implementation take so long to gain traction with school faculty?”

In the Kennewick model, the goal is set by the district leaders and implemented at the building level. Significant responsibility is placed on the building principal to “develop

a plan, based on its population and reading levels, for immediate implementation within existing resources” (Fielding et al, p. 124). This model changed in the *Elgin Reading Initiative*, with the districts agreeing to adopt five components of the model (90% goal, curriculum, schedule, assessment, professional development), but removing some of the building level decision evident in the Kennewick model. As a result, the *Reading Initiative* was mandated from top-down, district to school to classroom, and was not customizable by individual schools to their particular populations. This created a greater number of people who needed to “buy in” to the program, not just teachers, but also the principals, vice-principals, and reading specialists who would be responsible for the implementation and its results. Although the sense of urgency was understood by all as reflected in the low reading performance of students, a clear understanding of why *this* program would work was not developed by the building faculty.

This top-down decision making structure was also evident in discussions about the phasing out of the Elgin financial support. Teachers often responded “that answer’s above my pay grade” indicating that the “administrators above me make those decisions and don’t communicate that information to me.” Teachers were concerned about resource allocation with the removal of ECF funding, but had no information about the transition plans to assuage their concerns. Creating buy-in and maintaining buy-in of the teachers doing the day to day work of the implementation is critical, and communication from those “above their pay grade” about their plans would remedy those concerns. In addition, the teachers shared that a bottom-up flow of information from teachers to principals to district leaders about concerns and needs, as well as successes is needed.

### *Minding the Kitchen: The Need for Oversight to Ensure Fidelity*

When we talked with teachers and principals in schools that were either nearing the end of their ECF partnership, or had recently completed their final year of the program, both the external and internal oversight were highlighted as reasons for the fidelity of the implementation. During the initial years of the implementation, the ECF coaches served in this role. One of the coaches, whose name was mentioned the most, was described as “demanding” and that she “wanted it done right.” Teachers (and principals) explained how she would demonstrate and model for the teachers, at times even interrupting a lesson in progress, to correct a teacher’s pronunciation, physical cue, or pacing. Teachers discussed their anxiety in those first years of implementation when the ECF coaches observed in their classrooms. The coaches acknowledged this, stating how much of their work was “building trust” with the teachers, and that their presence was supportive, not punitive and not evaluative (especially critical in this age of teacher accountability measures).

The principals also discussed their reliance on both the ECF literacy coaches to understand the curriculum and pedagogy, as well as their work with the principal coach, for structuring the program through the data analysis using the Northwest Evaluation Association Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) scores. The coaches' oversight was necessary, to not only ensure the work was being done, but also to teach principals how to conduct the oversight work they would eventually be doing themselves. In schools that demonstrated significant gains, such as School C and School F, the principals both spoke highly of the literacy coaches and the principal coach in their work. They recounted shadowing the literacy coaches during their visits, sitting in on post-observation feedback sessions, and lengthy phone calls with the principal coach to discuss workshop group placements. The teachers reflected this, as they mentioned the principals' frequent appearances in classrooms, saying "the kids and I don't even notice anymore." With the principal coach, they described initial struggles with the coach, but eventually coming to an understanding of his methodology and intent. As one principal stated, "It was a rough start with Mr. X, but I really respect the man and I'm glad he actually did come in here, honestly. I learned a lot."

In moving forward, as schools and districts take on the onus of the intervention, this oversight will be managed internally by both district level supervisors and building level administrators. Teachers in schools that have already begun this process noted two concerns (1) new teachers not having the level of structured, outside support they did and (2) the slide back into "old ways" as supervisors become more lax in their use of outside materials. One district has anticipated the first concern by contracting internally with the ECF coaches to return after the end of the grant to lead teacher trainings and workshops. The second concern will be one that must be carefully discussed at the district and building level to determine the level of fidelity to the curriculum they will mandate as they move forward.



*Teacher leads a whole group read aloud lesson.*

## *Old Dog, New Tricks: The Importance of a Growth Mindset*

In our interviews, teachers and principals discussed the steep learning curve they had undertaken in their time with the reading initiative. Many honestly described their initial resistance to the program, and some expressed continued dissatisfaction with particular aspects of the program. Initially, some teachers felt that the adoption of the *Elgin Reading Initiative* challenged their professionalism, especially those with advanced degrees and a number of years of teaching experience. In one school, several teachers noted they had obtained additional certification as reading specialists and asserted “we are professionals.” These teachers described the curriculum as “strict,” “strident,” “scripted,” “rigid,” and “mandatory.” Additionally, some districts saw an increase in teacher retirements, as one teacher shared:

“That first year down in (school X) they had like 18 teachers quit like midyear, they just went ahead and retired because they didn’t like all the changes. So we did have the most retirements in Tazewell County I think probably with the first two years (of Elgin implementation) that we’ve ever seen.”

However, for the teachers who decided to remain in their position and continue with the initiative, they acknowledged a shift in their thinking, particularly from their work with the ECF literacy coaches and the resulting scores increases.

Teachers who were able to reflect on the changes resulting from the initiative spoke to this shift. A veteran teacher stated, “I’m proof you can teach an old dog new tricks. Especially when those new tricks help my students!” Another teacher spoke to the change that occurred when students’ reading scores began to rise, saying “If I see results, I work harder.” As teachers began to see the fruits of their labors, their buy-in to the program increased and their attitudes shifted towards both their own abilities and their students’ capacity to learn.

“I’m proof  
that you can  
teach an old  
dog new  
tricks.  
Especially  
when those  
new tricks  
help my  
students.”

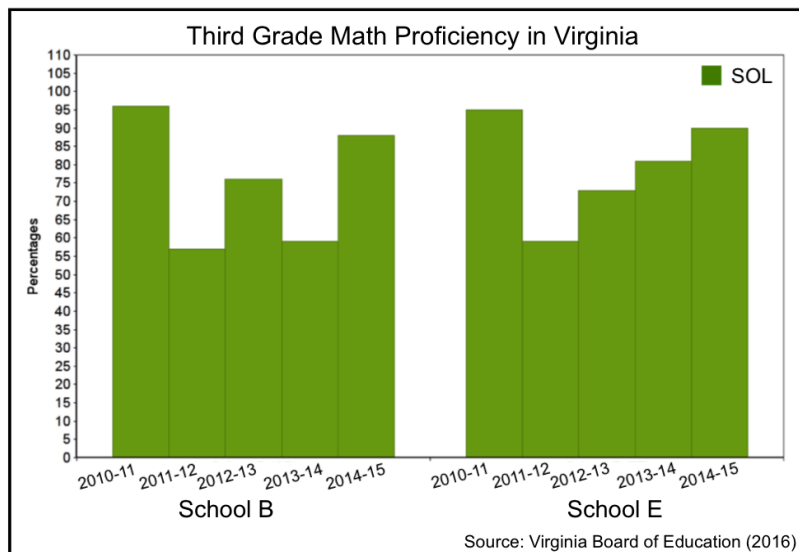
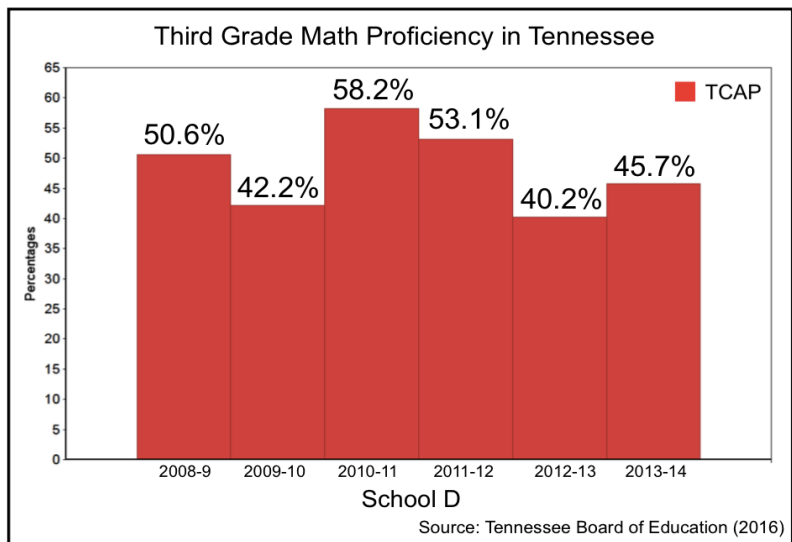
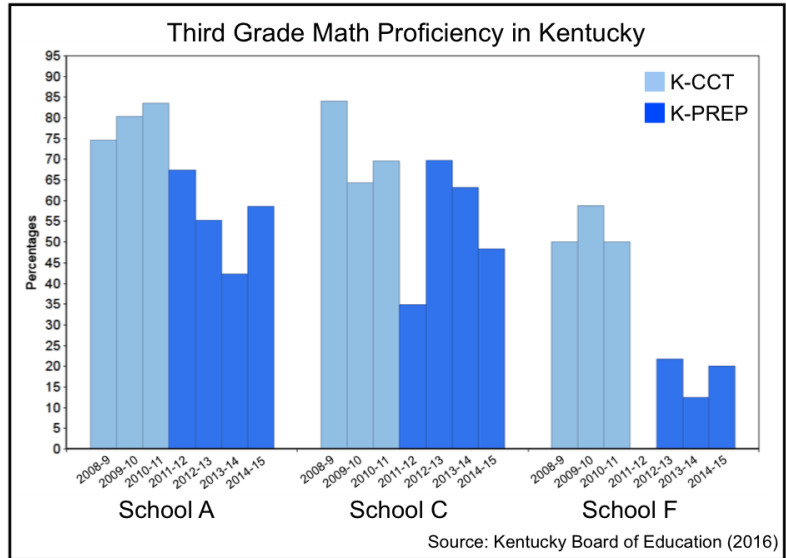
-1<sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher

**Figures 8-10: 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Math Proficiency on State Exams**

*The Blue Band Ban: The Implications of Narrowing the Curriculum*

The implementation of the *Imagine It!* curriculum was customized in the ECF program to include the green (phonics and fluency) and red (comprehension) “bands,” but excluded the blue (language arts/writing) “band.” This narrowed focus within the curriculum, while targeting instruction in the areas of decoding and comprehension, was forcing out the study of grammar, spelling, and writing. Many teachers discussed the loss of skills they had observed in their students in these areas, and the need to “find the time” outside of the three hour reading block to teach these skills. Some referred to concerns from 4th and 5th grade teachers (grades in which students are tested on writing on state assessments) that the quality of student writing had declined and was causing a shift in their curricular focus in those grades.

Additionally, concern was expressed about the limited time devoted to other subjects, including math, science, social studies, and specials (art, music, PE, computer). As one teacher said, “three hours of reading comes before everything else.” At



School B, a teacher reported “we only have 30 minutes for math and our scores have gone down.” (See *tables at right*) This sentiment was echoed at other schools, as teachers reflected on past units of study, especially in science and social studies they no longer taught due to the targeted focus on reading for such a significant portion of the school day. When principals were asked about this phenomenon, they acknowledged the loss of instructional time for other subjects, but re-emphasized the urgency of students reading at grade level as most profoundly impacting students’ future learning.

In reflecting back to our question about program implementation, we found through our observations, interviews, and surveys, that the Elgin reading program was implemented with a high level of fidelity. The Elgin coaches, who provided the knowledge and support that teachers and principals needed to be successful, influenced the fidelity of the implementation most. As the coaches began to taper their involvement, principals and support staff took on instructional leadership roles to continue the high level of fidelity. However, as districts and schools move towards independently implementing the program, they will need to address the unexpected outcomes of the narrowed curriculum, especially in writing and mathematics, to ensure their students are provided a comprehensive curriculum.

***Question 2: What do implementation patterns indicate regarding the impact on school culture and student achievement?***

As we examined the impact of the implementation on school culture, the turning point for attaining teacher buy-in was the end of year score reporting. When teachers began to see measureable results of their efforts, their attitudes and perceptions began to change. Each year, as teachers and principals made positive modifications to their implementation of the program, grew in their understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy, and took more ownership of the project, the steady climb in scores continued. The inverse was true as well, when scores dropped (typically due to lack of fidelity) teacher attitudes and perceptions were negatively impacted towards the program. Teachers ultimately needed to see a return on their own investment of time and energy to the outcomes they were promised by the initiative.

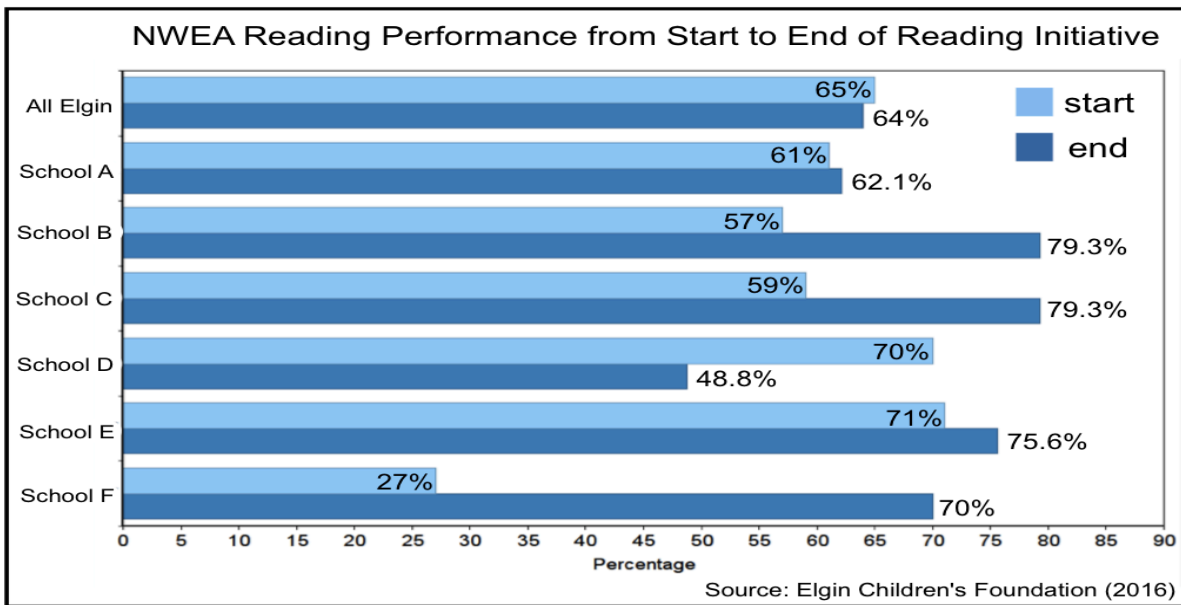
***A Common Assessment***

One of our tasks from ECF was to review the previously collected test score data for a deeper examination. We first examined the MAP scores, as this was the common assessment utilized across the ECF partner schools. We decided to isolate the scores for the six schools we visited to connect the fidelity of implementation we observed during



our visits with the initiative’s efficacy through the resulting test scores. In the table below, MAP scores for the end of the first year of implementation are compared with the MAP scores from end of the last year of implementation. There is no baseline MAP data from the year prior to the implementation, as the MAP assessment was not utilized by the schools before the initiative. In assessing individual schools, Schools B, C, and F show measurable growth over the 5 year period. Schools A and E show some growth, but started with high scores after their first year of implementation. School D, shows a marked decline in scores in the final year of implementation, and as a result was exited from the program early after these scores were reported. As will be discussed later (See *The Scores Show It*), School D teachers noted reasons for this decline, including a lack of fidelity to the implementation of the program and a lack of leadership oversight. Interestingly, when the scores for all the ECF schools were aggregated, a slightly higher percentage (65%) was noted in the first year of implementation, as compared to the final year (64%).

**Figure 11: NWEA Reading Performance from Start to End of Reading Initiative**

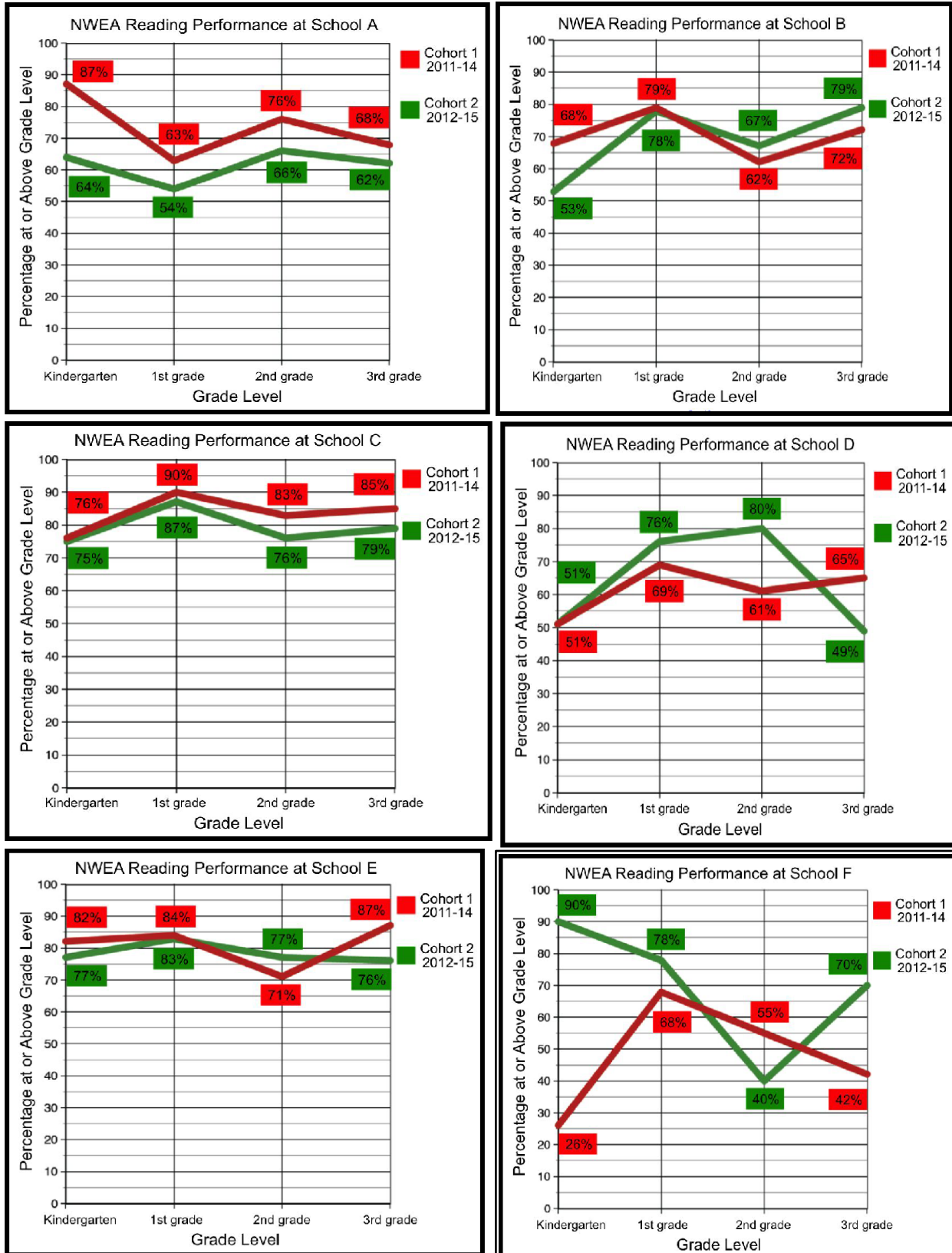


*Following the Cohorts*

In recognizing the differences between groups of children, and to truly measure the impact of the reading initiative over time, we followed the initial cohorts of children who began the intervention in kindergarten and completed 3rd grade under the program to determine if there was a magnified effect of having the targeted instruction for four

years. The charts below utilize the end of year scores at each grade level to examine performance over time. During the implementation period, two cohorts of children moved through the full program from K-3rd grade.

Figures 12-17: Cohort Comparison of NWEA Reading Performance by School



The patterns that emerge in the individual schools for the two sets of cohorts are interesting. At Schools A, B, C, and mostly E, the lines move in a similar pattern between Cohorts 1 and 2, with rises and dips at the same grade levels. At School A, we see a wide range at the end of kindergarten, 87% for Cohort 1 and 64% for Cohort 2. As these cohorts move through the succeeding grades, we see a dip in 1st grade, a rise in 2nd grade, and a dip in 3rd grade. By the end of third grade, the gap between the two narrowed (68% and 62%), but both were below the scores achieved at the end of their kindergarten years.

At School B, we see a similar trend, with a wide gap (15%) at the end of kindergarten (68% for Cohort 1 and 53% for Cohort 2). There is growth in 1st grade (the two groups nearly matched at 79% and 78%) with a decline in 2nd grade and then growth in 3rd grade, resulting in 72% for Cohort 1 and 79% for Cohort 2. Both groups showed gains by the end of the third grade, with Cohort 2 showing a stronger growth curve, from 53% to 79% in 4 years, compared to a 4% growth for Cohort 1, from 68% to 72%.

At School C, the line graph is tightly aligned, with the first cohort consistently higher than the second, with a range of 1% to 7% difference between the grades. In this pattern we see an increase in first grade, a dip in second grade, and an increase in third grade, with an overall growth of 9% for Cohort 1 and 4% for Cohort 2 in the 4 years.

School E shows an interesting variation in this pattern. The two cohorts follow the same trend through 2nd grade, as we see an increase in 1st grade and a decline in 2nd grade. However, in third grade, there is an increase for cohort 1 and a decrease for cohort 2. Additionally, this is the first time we see the cohort lines cross over one another, as cohort 1 showed a sharper decline in 2nd grade than cohort 2. In looking at overall performance, cohort 1 gained 5% over the 4 year period, and cohort 2 lost 1% from kindergarten to 3rd grade. The gap between the groups was also widened from a 5% difference at the end of kindergarten to an 11% difference by the end of 3rd grade.

Schools D and F show very different patterns from the other four schools. In School D, its first cohort achieved an overall growth of 14% from the end of kindergarten to the end of third grade, with an increase in 1st grade, a decline in 2nd grade, and an increase in 3rd grade. The second cohort demonstrates a 2% decline from kindergarten to third grade. However, the data for first and second grades show an alarming trend, as cohort 2 gains 25% in 1st grade, an additional 5% in second grade to reach 80% and then plummets to 49% at the end of third grade. This result was devastating to the school, and especially the third grade teachers, resulting in ECF dropping the school from the intervention as well as the principal restructuring the third grade team.

School F tells just the opposite story from School D. Cohort 1 demonstrated an overall growth of 16% from kindergarten to third grade, and cohort 2 a 20% decline over the same period. Whereas Cohort 1 showed a sharp increase from kindergarten to 1st grade, from 26% to 68%, that growth was not maintained, and declines were seen in both 2nd and 3rd grade, with a final third grade score of 42%. Cohort 2 started at the actual target level of the program, scoring a 90% at the end of kindergarten. However, those gains were lost in 1st and 2nd grade, dipping to 78% and 40% respectively. Yet, Cohort 2 was able to recover some ground in 3rd grade, ultimately scoring 70%, much higher than cohort 1 at 42%. One has to wonder though, if the cohorts had been able to at least maintain their highest scores, or even better improve each year, if School F could have reached the 90% goal by the end of 3rd grade, especially with Cohort 2.



*Literacy sound cards display corresponding images.*

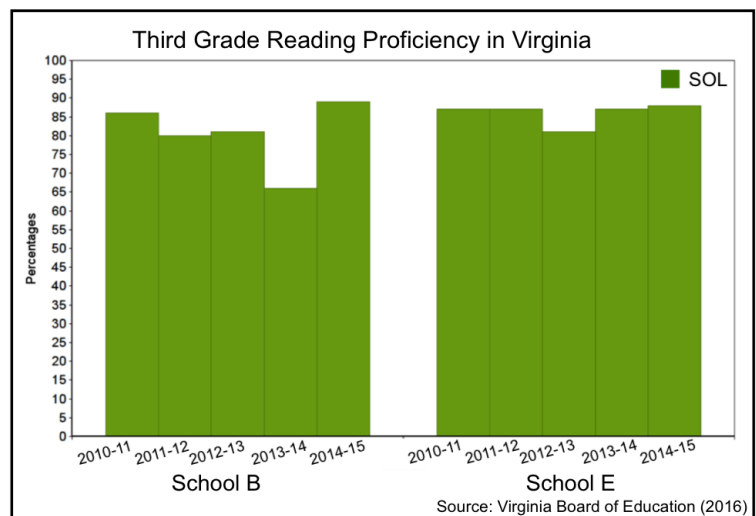
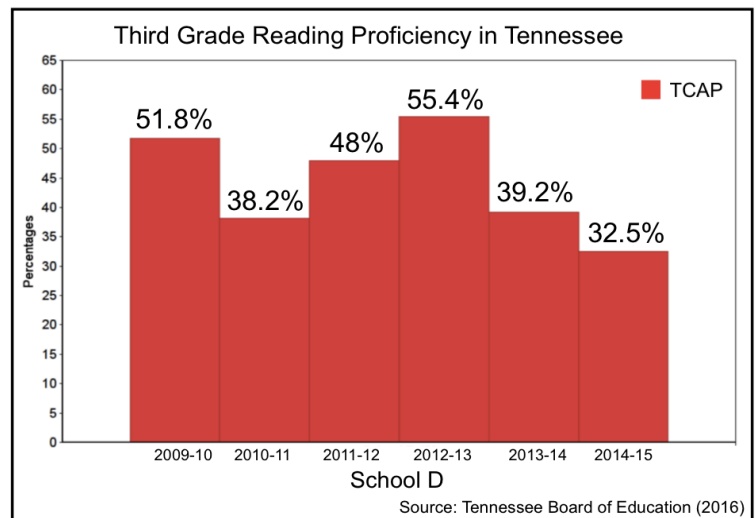
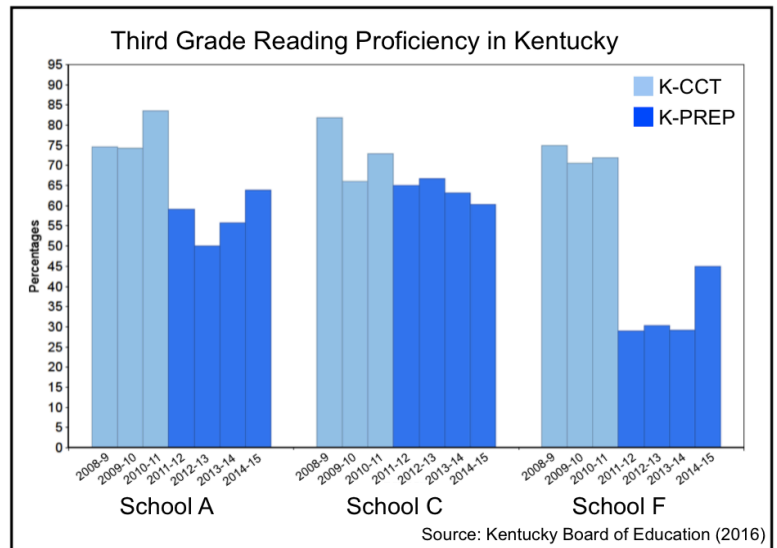
## The Differences in State Tests

A final set of data that we examined were the state scores for each selected school. While the NWEA MAP scores presented earlier provide a comparison across all the participating schools, the state data can only be used to compare schools within the same state, since Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia each utilize different tests. Additionally, the Kentucky state tests changed in 2011-2012, during the initiative implementation, from the Kentucky Core Content Test (K-CCT) to the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP), which was aligned with more rigorous Common Core State Standards. This change resulted in dramatic drops in school performance in Schools A and F, and noticeable drops in School C. Virginia altered its Standards of Learning (SOL) test in 2012-2013 to include “technology-enhanced items” and a dip in scores at School E is evident that year, however it was able to recover in the following year to its prior performance level.

### The Scores Show It: The Efficacy of the Intervention

The test score data presents opportunities for exploration as to how each school arrived at the levels they were able to achieve. Throughout our interviews, teachers,

Figures 18-20: 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency



principals, and the Elgin coaches referred often to the scores, both MAP and state assessments, as the measure for their efforts. The refrain “the scores show it” was heard repeatedly across grade levels and schools. The data-driven decision making inherent in the ECF initiative had definitely permeated into the discussion. But what do the scores really show, beyond the level of achievement?

Returning to the MAP data, the consistent achievement patterns between Schools A, B, and C, and E encourage us to look for similarities between these schools to help explain the results. Two schools were located in Kentucky, two in Virginia. The two Kentucky schools had higher SPED populations than the Virginia schools (18-19% vs. 10-12%), as well as higher FRPL percentages (71-75% vs. 48-54%). Enrollment at the schools ranged from 442-562, and grade span ranged from PK-5 to PK-8. Therefore, there was a great deal of variation among these four schools.

However, in looking at the school profiles, what immediately stands out is consistent instructional leadership at the building level. Not only were the principals in all four of these schools there for the duration of the initiative, but they also took on active roles as instructional leaders in their buildings. These principals spoke both to their work with the principal coach and the utilization of data, as well as their learning from the instructional coaches about the pedagogy of reading and the strategy of coaching. As the Kennewick model emphasizes:

Primary accountability is with building principals. Elementary principals will be expected to provide significant leadership to achieve this goal...Principals can create the teams that open the doors, keep ideas flowing, and pool urgently needed resources...our principals welcome high expectations as long as the level of support and level of contact are also high (Fielding et al, p. 127).

In addition to strong principals who view themselves as instructional leaders, these schools also had other administrative support, including vice-principals and reading specialists, who formed a team with the principal to support the initiative within the school. In these schools, teachers repeatedly mentioned the presence and involvement of their principals or other support administrators. During our visits we observed this, as principals easily and unobtrusively moved in and out of classrooms, the teachers and students often paying them little attention, a true indication of their comfort level with this process (especially the children). Teachers simply continued with their instruction, the children briefly looking up at the principal, but then returning their attention to their teachers. Later in the interviews, many teachers referred to this practice: “they’re (principal and vice principal) in our rooms everyday,” and “I’m very comfortable with being

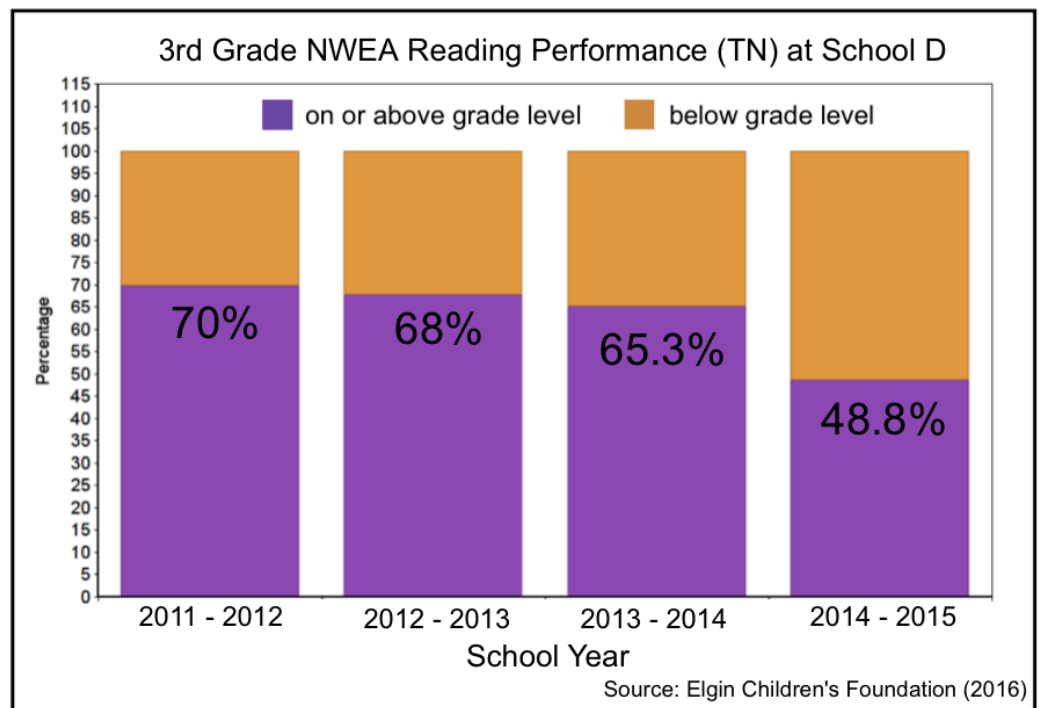
observed now.” This combined effect of both presence (“minding the kitchen”) and instructional knowledge of the building principals influences continued fidelity to the implementation, and ultimately the efficacy of the program.

This impact of school leadership is also significant for the performances in Schools D and F. In looking at School F, which experienced dramatic shifts in performance that moved to score gains, a new principal was placed during the implementation. This principal, although coming from a high school background, expressed both a deep interest in data-driven decision making (referring to herself as a “data queen”) as well as a desire to learn about elementary reading pedagogy. As she took on the role of instructional leader in her building, she emphasized the use of data (even creating data folders for the students themselves to monitor) and fidelity to the program. As a result, she and her teachers echoed the refrain, “the scores show it!” to describe their achievements.

Conversely, School D ultimately demonstrates the negative impact on scores when strong instructional leadership is missing. The principal at School D proudly showed us his data wall and talked about how he utilizes it for decision making. However, instructional oversight fell to the school’s reading specialist, who seemed both overwhelmed and frustrated with her position. Originally hired to work with small groups of struggling readers as an

interventionist, she was now managing the implementation, including supervising and evaluating teachers, ordering and distributing materials, and scheduling support staff for workshops and intervention groups. More than one teacher described her as “poor Mrs. X” as

**Figure 21:** NWEA Reading Performance at School D



they too recognized her feelings of being overwhelmed. In discussing the principal, the teachers stated, “the blame was put on us”, “he scores us to death” and “he doesn’t know what to look for in my room.” The teachers also described how “we do something different every year” and when asked why the scores had dropped so dramatically answered, “the workshop and Reading Mastery were always getting cancelled” due to lack of staff or scheduling changes. Once again, in combination, this lack of fidelity and instructional leadership are ultimately apparent in the results, this time with a decline. Truly the “scores show it.”

This combined data set demonstrates that performance at every grade matters. In every school, we can see the dramatic impacts that gains and losses over the four year span from kindergarten to third grade have on the final MAP scores in third grade. None of the schools visited have achieved the 90% goal for third grade, but two did achieve a 90% score in earlier grades for one cohort: School C in 1st grade and School F in kindergarten. While School C was able to regain some of its losses in 2nd grade, to finish at 85% in third grade; School F suffered a devastating combined drop from 1st and 2nd grade of 50%, finally resulting in a 3rd grade rebound to 70%. Could Schools C and F had these cohorts reach the 90% goal by the end of third grade if the succeeding grades’ teachers had been able to maintain that 90% level already achieved in an earlier grade? And in the examples from Schools A, B, D, and E, could their students have made the same achievement if their trajectory had continued to at least maintain, or better yet continue to climb, rather than experience a yo-yo effect of increase and decline across the four year period?

Our findings here indicate that every grade level matters. In the interviews, teachers discussed the variances in professional development for those who had changed grade levels or were newly hired. This underscores the fact that every teacher at every level must have the knowledge and skills to teach to a high level of fidelity. In some schools, we interviewed teachers who had changed grade levels several times during the implementation: some received summer or school year workshops on their new grade level curriculum, some did not. New teacher training was varied as well, often impacted by date of hire. Some new teachers were able to attend summer trainings if they were hired early enough; others waited until the fall after school began to attend a training, as they had been hired in August. Other new teachers were being trained by internal district/school coaches or mentored by a fellow teacher. These differences create variances in efficacy and fidelity at the grade level, which can impact the achievement of an entire cohort of students.

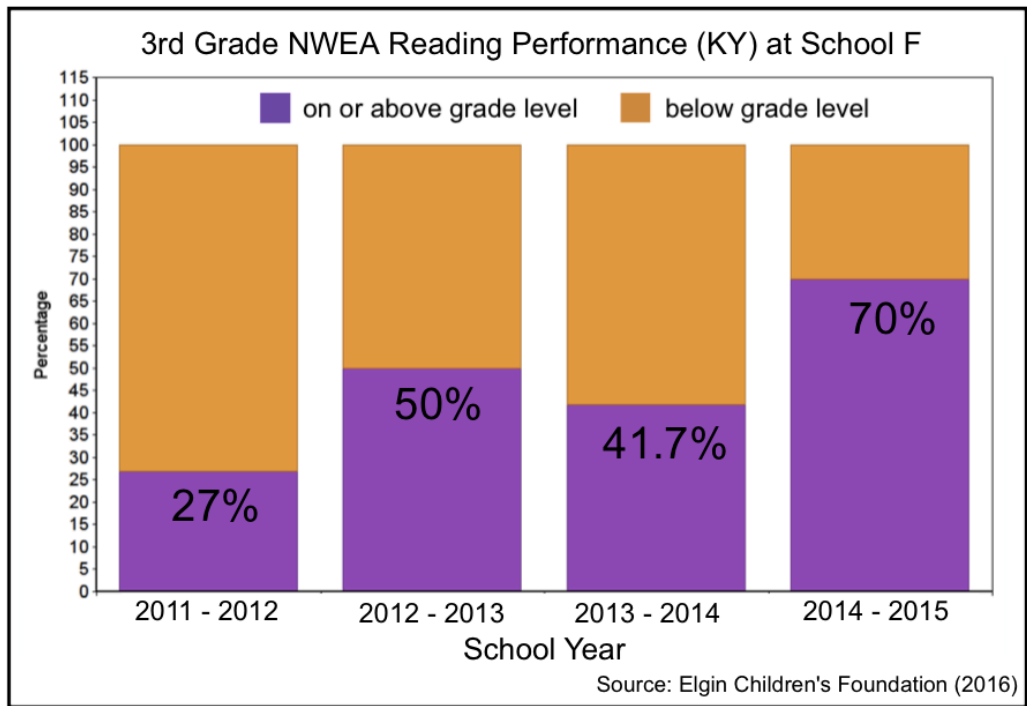


*From Worst to First: Cultural Change in Response to Achievement*

When we asked teachers and principals about the changes in their pedagogy and school culture, many began their conversations with the impact of achievement. Buy-in to the Elgin Reading Initiative was initially stalled. Such a radical shift in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, scheduling, and personnel usage was described as a “shock to the system” especially in districts with long-time veteran teachers and administrators. Veteran teachers often described a very hands-off approach to classroom teaching from the district and principals. Teachers even within the same grade level and the same school were using different curricular materials, strategies, and philosophies to teach reading. The highly structured, uniform approach in the Elgin Initiative was a radical departure from that. However, buy-in to the new approach slowly came as teachers and principals began to see “the fruits of their labors”.

This shift was most evident at School F, as both teachers and principal proudly shared their school had literally moved “from worst to first” in the state for gains in reading achievement. As seen in **Figure 22**, they moved

**Figure 22:** NWEA Reading Performance at School F



from 27% in their first year of the program to 70% by the fourth year. Teachers proclaimed: “We have the highest scores in the county! We’re first in the state for gains!” “I’ve seen tremendous growth, the scores show it!” “Our confidence has grown!” “The kids are more excited, we get compliments from the parents!”

In this current era of accountability, in an area experiencing economic hardship and

historical low performance, for teachers to have renewed confidence in their abilities, to see the positive rewards for their efforts, is rare.

*You Don't Have to Be a Coal Miner: Creating New Expectations for Students*

In the 1980 movie, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, Doolittle says to Loretta: "There ain't nothin' in Kentucky for me except a chest full of coal dust and being an old man before I'm forty." The dependence of the Appalachian region on the coal mining industry is multi-generational, and is yet shifting. As cleaner and cheaper forms of fuel are sought, the Appalachian region is seeing a decline in demand for coal, resulting in the closing of mines and rising unemployment. The repercussions of this loss of industry, which could at one time provide a livable blue-collar wage for families, has been devastating to the counties served by ECF. Additionally, it has shifted the population demographics, as one district administrator stated, "We're losing our middle class." As area mines close, middle-management jobs are relocated, but the miners themselves are left behind, unemployed and without a skill set for other opportunities. Teachers and principals describe another shift they have seen in the community, as drug usage has increased, specifically meth. They shared how an increasing percentage of students are living in single parent homes, with grandparents, or in foster care, as their parents are either addicted to drugs or incarcerated for drug-related offenses. In this environment, educational opportunity becomes even more critical.

Connected with the change in culture that arises from achievement, comes a change in expectations, both for the teachers themselves, but also for their students. With historically low achievement data, the

*"This is Coal Country and coal has left our system. There's no coal left. We've lost our middle class. They're gone."*

-District Level Administrator

self-perpetuating idea that children are not capable of rising to higher levels of achievement can continue. However, the ambitiousness of the 90% goal turns that expectation on its head. Teachers admitted that reading achievement results changed both their attitudes about the initiative but also their expectations for students.

Teachers described how the initiative required them to “set high expectations for the kids.” One teacher shared that the program “begins skills before I would have, but they can get it!” Other teachers echoed this, saying “all kids are reading better, and earlier” than they were before the program. “The lightbulb has finally clicked on!” stated another teacher. Across schools, teachers particularly noted increases in phonics understanding, letter/sound knowledge and decoding skills. One teacher ended her interview with the final statement, “I’ve seen the kids grow.” In one striking vignette, a young teacher shared these thoughts:

“But the way this program is bringing us along, I think we feel like we’re confident enough that we can do anything with our lives, our careers...you know what I mean? So you don’t have to be...a coal miner. You don’t have to be these things, if you’re willing to work and to read and to really try. Our thinking process has been changed a little bit for our culture. Education has now become more important. And how much has the reading program contributed to that? Secretly, I think a lot. Nobody’s gonna come in from the outside world and say, “Boy, that reading program you’re teaching is really changing how my child is.” But...if they’re smarter and they can read more and they can blend more, you see what I’m saying? It all goes in those building blocks and those foundations that a lot of people don’t see, you know? So...um...the kids, I think...when it comes to those tests and those MAP tests. They’ve seen it before and they think...they’re just confident, you know? They’re confident, so...that’s a biggie with this area. You know what I mean? We want to know that we’re on the same playing field as the rest of them. What are they doing that we’re not that’s got them there? But I think with the reading program, we’ve seen a lot of good things. You know, we’re battling a lot of things...outside things that’s...tough. Of course everywhere in the world it is, but here...with poverty-stricken and all kinds of different things going on here. I think that the reading program, I don’t want to say levels the playing field, but it helps.”

In examining the efficacy of the Elgin reading program and its impact on both school culture and student achievement, we found that strong literacy-minded instructional leadership from principals drove success. With high fidelity implementation came results in the form of improved test scores. Teacher buy-in to the program was achieved once they saw the “fruits of the labors”. From this, expectations for both

students and teachers changed, as teachers saw themselves as knowledgeable teachers of reading and their students as highly capable learners. This culture of higher expectation is spreading into the community as students and their families begin to experience educational success.

***Question 3: What factors (including human capital, financial, organizational, leadership) influence the long term sustainability of the program?***

The seven counties included in the Elgin Reading Initiative are in different stages of implementation, some nearing the end of the five year period, others recently transitioning out of the program, and one school was exited from the initiative early. Therefore, we were able to explore the sustainability of the project, as schools and districts were either preparing for exit, or currently undertaking the first year of independently carrying the project. From these discussions, we examined the initial transition plans, as well as concerns (even anxieties) of the feasibility of school districts taking on the sustainability of the project without Elgin supports.

*Riding the Wall: The Necessity of Strong and Consistent Leadership*

A primary finding that echoed throughout the teacher, principal, and coach interviews was the dire importance of strong, consistent leadership at all levels for the success of the initiative. ECF provided that initial leadership to implement the program by establishing the structure and resources to districts. However, the success of the implementation came from district leaders who agreed to the partnership, and the principals who oversaw the work in their buildings. As discussed earlier under the other two project questions, the need to ensure that someone is “minding the kitchen” is critical to continued fidelity to the structure and curriculum of the initiative.

As stated in the Kennewick model, leadership must begin at the district level. It is the district leadership’s responsibility to both set the achievement goal and communicate that goal to the school leadership and faculty and the community. In accordance with that responsibility, the district must provide for the allocation of resources to meet the goal. As discussed in the earlier section, *That’s Above My Pay Grade*, the communication of the goal from the district has not been clear in most districts. Whether this is from miscommunication or lack of communication, districts must assume the onus of the goal and clear dissemination to ensure clarity in mission and vision for the district. Additionally, the adoption of the goal must stand central to the work of the district,

especially in times of leadership transition, both at the superintendent level and the principal level. Leadership transition was identified by teachers, principals, and ECF coaches as the biggest threat to future sustainability.

As the ECF coaches taper their support in schools, the leaders at the building level take on the responsibility of coaching and evaluating classroom teaching. Principals that have embraced the role of instructional leader have seen the greatest buy-in from their teachers and performance gains by their students. However, all of the principals we met are nearing retirement age. The impending retirements of school leaders presents an immediate need to plan for leadership succession, seeking out those who have been trained in the ECF model, and understand not only the curriculum, pedagogy, and coaching strategies, but can also implement the structural components of scheduling, data analysis, and resource allocation.

#### *Hire Me Back When I Retire: Sustainability Supports*

To continue to build on the foundation laid by ECF, first districts need to renew their commitment to the 90% goal and ensure strong, consistent leadership in place. They also need to ensure that the necessary resources, previously funded by ECF are both budgeted and distributed. In our interviews with teachers and principals, three specific categories of resources were identified: curriculum materials, personnel, and professional development.

The curriculum materials originally purchased for the initiative are now 5-6 years old. Unlike textbooks for middle and high school students that are hard-bound and longer-lasting, developmentally-appropriate materials for early elementary students include many hands-on resources, as well as consumable items for children to take home to share with their families. For the *Imagine It!* curriculum, this includes workshop kits with teacher-made games and cards, tear-out paper take-home readers, and individual workbooks, which must be replaced yearly for each group of students. Additionally, with 5-6 years of heavy usage, teacher's manuals and other components, such as the sound-spelling cards, are showing wear and tear. Finally, McGraw-Hill, the publisher of *Imagine It!* updated its curriculum to *Open Court Reading* in 2015, which could offer new materials and strategies based on more current research than the 2007 edition currently being utilized. The curriculum purchase was a significant portion of ECF's original investment, and school districts will need to carefully budget to fill this gap.

The *Elgin Reading Initiative* is a heavily personnel dependent model. Rather than a

classroom teacher being solely responsible for the instruction of his/her 20+ students, additional staff are needed to support small group workshops and Reading Mastery intervention groups. Many schools have been creative in finding these personnel, including changing the roles classroom aides, Title 1 staff, Promise Neighborhood interns, even re-hiring retired teachers for part time roles. Principals described “creative budgeting” practices, “scraping together” funds from different programs and reallocating other funds. Sustaining the sheer number of quality personnel needed will require both funding and “finding the right people” in an area with a limited trainable pool of potential employees.

Another aspect of the personnel issue is retention of current teachers and impending retirements of veteran teachers. In our survey, the vast majority of teachers (64%) had 11 or more years of experience. Only 6% of teachers in our sample had 2 or fewer years of teaching experience. The veteran nature of the faculty within ECF partner schools represents both an opportunity and challenge for the reading reform effort. There is a high level of stability within the schools’ teaching force that contributes to greater institutional knowledge of the program. Over half of respondents had worked more than 10 years at their current elementary school. However, the pending retirements of many of these seasoned veterans means both a loss of that institutional programmatic knowledge, as well as an urgent need to train a new crop of novice teachers in the reading initiative components.

Professional development has been a key component of the success of the *Elgin Reading Initiative*. Teachers and principals repeatedly attributed their growth in curriculum knowledge and pedagogy to the summer workshops and the school year coaching sessions. The instructional coaching, with its targeted focus, immediate feedback, and supportive tone was referenced by teachers across all schools and grade levels. “They taught me how to teach reading!” was heard several times. Although there were concerns about inconsistencies between coaches, and some neutral responses concerning the coaches in the surveys, the overwhelming response was both positive and needed. Current teachers expressed their confidence in being able to move forward in their implementation because “they trained us well.” Yet many teachers recognized the necessity of this same training for newly incoming teachers to the school to ensure continued fidelity to the program. In schools that have already transitioned out of the program, districts have either hired the ECF coaches as contract employees to provide trainings or identified and promoted teachers in their schools to become district level coaches.

### *Laid Back, Fall Back: Anxieties About Sustainability*

In our interviews, we asked teachers if they had any concerns about the future sustainability of the program. One concern that resonated was the fear that without ECF oversight and the “carrot” of funding, that teachers would “fall back to their old ways of doing things.” This was said both in schools nearing the end of their partnership, as well as those already taking on implementation ownership. In one county, a relaxing of the implementation guidelines is already occurring.

Since Tazewell County has transitioned out of ECF funding, they have rebranded the program to the “Tazewell County Reading Initiative.” Although the plan looks identical to the *Elgin Reading Initiative* on paper, there are definite nuanced changes to the program. The change most referenced by teachers was the “relaxation” of curricular material usage. Under the ECF initiative, only “materials with the Elgin stamp” could be utilized. Nothing that “competed with *Imagine It!*” could be used, especially materials from other reading series.

Under the new Tazewell-branded initiative, teachers were told they could “add their own flair and pizzazz” to the curriculum with other materials. As one teacher stated, it’s “untied our hands a bit”. Although the teachers overall seemed happy to have some leniency restored, and their professional judgment valued, many worried about “dilution” of the program. Once the teachers bought into the program, and saw the positive outcomes in their test scores, they worried about the ramifications that could occur with a loss of fidelity.

As we looked to identify the elements needed for sustainability of the project, strong instructional leadership again rose to the top of the list. A renewed commitment by district leaders is necessary, as well as ensuring that every school has a principal who is knowledgeable of reading pedagogy, instructional coaching, and data utilization. Careful attention will need to be paid to financial allocation for materials, personnel, and professional development training, which were previously provided through ECF. Finally, the school leadership needs to ensure that with the transition, that high fidelity to the program continues, and teachers do not “fall back” into ineffective practices.

## DISCUSSION

In our use of qualitative research methods, we organized our findings by themes that arose from the conversational and colloquial nature of our interviews with teachers, administrators, and Elgin coaches. These themes provided us with a structure to embed our research within the unique context of the Appalachian region, while also connecting our findings with broader understandings that emerged from our analysis of the data. As we looked across the themes we envisioned ourselves as “mining” out key concepts to utilize as we linked our findings to the research literature. In extracting these larger takeaways from our findings, we connect our work with the broader academic community.

***Mining the Key Concept #1:*** *The Elgin program was implemented with fidelity and consistency across schools. The implementation required all teachers to change their practices, which led to frustrations in some teachers and was embraced by others.*

Our first project question focused on the fidelity of the implementation of the Elgin reading program within the partner schools. From our observations, interviews, and surveys, we found that overall the program was implemented with a high level of fidelity and consistency. This was achieved through the interplay of three factors:

1. administrative (district and school level) leadership;
2. the work of the Elgin literacy coaches, and
3. changes in teachers’ practice.

The implementation of this specific program did bring one drawback, in the narrowing of the curriculum, both within the broader study of language arts and limiting the time for other subjects including mathematics, science, and social studies. We highlighted these findings within our themes *That’s Above My Pay Grade*, *Minding the Kitchen*, *Old Dog New Tricks*, and *The Blue Band Ban*.

In *That’s Above My Pay Grade*, we discussed how teachers and principals were not involved in the initial decision to bring Elgin Reading Initiative to the districts. Instead, the process was driven by decisions by district superintendents and school boards who implemented from the central office. This design was actually in opposition to the original Kennewick design, which held decision-making within buildings with principals and teachers. With this top-down model of implementation, there were missed opportunities in creating teacher buy-in earlier, as well as empowering and enabling principals to assume roles of instructional leadership in the school.



Principals and teachers need to be a part of the decision-making process in school reform efforts for the changes to be effective and long-lasting. Ferris (1992) discusses this in his examination of the principal-agent perspective: “A change in the locus of decision making is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for reaping the benefits of school-based decision making” (p. 340). He continues by discussing the benefits that come from moving this locus of decision making out of the district office to the school: “As authority is decentralized, there also exists the potential for stimulating other sources of enhanced performance such as teacher empowerment, parental and community involvement, and school leadership, depending on the specific structure of school decentralization” (p. 343). These “additional sources of enhanced performance” including teacher, parent, and principal involvement will ultimately drive and sustain the reform effort.

This finding was also reflected in the work of Boyd et al (2011) in their examination of the role of school administration on teacher retention. “Teachers are also more likely to stay in schools where they have the opportunity to contribute to school-wide decision making such as decisions about scheduling, selection of materials, and selection of professional development experiences” (p. 306). They studied school contextual factors such as teacher influence, administrative support, staff relations, student behavior, school facilities, and school safety, and found that administrative support was an important factor in teachers’ retention decisions.

This need for administrative support was echoed in our finding *Minding the Kitchen*. Additionally the Elgin reading coaches played a central role in the fidelity of the program implementation. They were simultaneously perceived as knowledgeable and helpful while also being strict and demanding. Coburn and Woulfin (2012) describe the “educative” and “political” roles that reading coaches play in “mediating the relationship” between implementing a new reading policy and the teachers’ classroom practice. The coaches “were often able to support teachers in moving to deeper forms of implementation because they helped them negotiate technical challenges of enacting new approaches in their classrooms” (p. 17), and by persuading the teachers that “the new practices were similar to what they already did or were consistent with their beliefs and values” (p. 21). The coaches played their “political role” when they “explicitly invoked power to get teachers to make changes in their classrooms. In most cases, perhaps because they did not have formal authority over teachers, the coaches invoked the power of others (the grant, the principal, or the state) to pressure teachers” (p. 19). The coaches’ dual function of support and pressure uniquely places them in a position to implement change.

Even with this support, some teachers, particularly veteran teachers, found the

changes to be too much, and ultimately left the districts. Those who did remain were required to radically change their practices. These “old dogs” had to learn “new tricks” to successfully implement the new program. Teacher efficacy came to be a critical issue for the period of intense learning and growth during the first years of the implementation. Applying Hoy and Spero’s (2005) work on efficacy in a teacher’s early years of practice, positive changes in efficacy correlated with levels of support during the first year of teaching. “Efficacy is a future-oriented judgment that has to do with perceptions of competence rather than actual level of competence. This is an important distinction because people regularly overestimate or underestimate their actual abilities, and these estimations may have consequences for the courses of action they choose to pursue and the effort they exert in those pursuits” (p. 344). Just as new teachers need support in their early years of practice, so do veteran teachers in the initial implementation of a new program.

This focus on teacher efficacy reaps rewards in student performance. Corkett, Hatt, and Benevides (2011) found a positive correlation between students’ reading ability and teachers’ self-efficacy for teaching reading. “There appears to be a relationship between teacher self-efficacy and student achievement in reading and writing where teachers with high self-efficacy own the responsibility of teaching all children and those with low self efficacy, attribute problems to the students” (Corkett, et. al, p. 72). In our conversations with teachers, we heard this finding echoed, as teachers took ownership of student learning, spoke to raised expectations, and declared themselves to be knowledgeable teachers of reading.

This level of teacher efficacy also empowered teachers to reflect on missing components of the reading program, and how the more narrowed focus on decoding and comprehension had produced gaps in student knowledge and skills in the broader language arts. *The Blue Band Ban* examined the confines placed on instruction during the three-hour reading block and the impact on performance in writing and other subjects, including mathematics. Dresser (2012) found in an action research study on scripted literacy instruction that while the program did show positive effects on reading comprehension, that it came at a price. “In many low-income schools, the time allocated to subjects like science, social studies, art and physical education is minimal or non-existent. This can increase the gap between underrepresented and more affluent student populations” (p. 78). Dresser continues that “the only way the students can achieve high levels of language and content knowledge is if they learn the content and the language related to all subjects” (p. 78). Therefore, as more time is focused on literacy instruction, attention needs to be paid that other subject learning is not suffering.

**Mining the Key Concept #2:** *Teachers and community expectations were shaped by program effectiveness. Teachers needed to see a return on their own investment of time & energy to the outcomes they were promised by the Initiative.*

Our second project question centered on the efficacy of the reading initiative, as we examined how implementation patterns reflected the changes in school culture and student achievement. Three themes emerged from this analysis: *The Scores Show It*, *From Worst to First*, and *You Don't have to be a Coal Miner*. Reflected within each of these themes is how resulting student achievement changed perceptions of not only the program's effectiveness, but also the abilities of both teachers and students to raise achievement levels.

In our finding *The Scores Show It*, teachers described how their buy-in to the Reading Initiative increased as students' reading performance improved. At schools where gains did not occur (or were not as profound), teachers were more negative and did not demonstrate the same level of buy-in (if at all). The interplay of instructional support from coaches, teacher efficacy, and resulting achievement demonstrated to teachers that their efforts were worthwhile. Goddard, Hoy and Hoy (2000) researched the impact of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement, finding that it is both a significant predictor of student achievement in reading achievement and is positively associated with reading achievement. "Teachers' beliefs about the faculty's capability to successfully educate students constitute a norm that influences the actions and achievements of schools" (Goddard et al, p. 496). The researchers further state, "if most teachers in a school are highly efficacious, the normative environment will press teachers to persist in their educational efforts" (p. 497).

This normative environment emerges when teachers develop self-efficacy in a supported community of learners, which can be nurtured through strategic professional development. Tshannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) identified the format of professional development as "mastery experience through the use of strategy in a teacher's own classroom followed by a debriefing session with feedback from coach" to have the strongest effects on teacher efficacy for reading instruction and implementation of specific strategies. This format mirrors the approach utilized in the ECF reading initiative. The authors describe how "professional development training that included follow-up coaching, in which participants received support as they developed the new teaching skill, was related to increased implementation. (This) ...underscores the importance of these follow-up coaching experiences in providing teachers needed

assistance as they attempt to implement a new skill” (p. 242). Teachers in the study saw that “the awareness of a new instructional strategy that is shown to have an impact on struggling readers caused some teachers to reassess their definition of good teaching and to provoke a recalibration of their own self-efficacy beliefs against this new standard” (p. 241). Ultimately, as we also related in our findings, once teachers are provided with the support to develop the skills needed for change, and teachers see the results of their efforts, not only does their efficacy rise, but student achievement does also.

In our finding *From Worst to First*, the ability of school leadership to leverage the increased knowledge, skill, and efficacy of teachers that was built through working with the Elgin coaches is critical. A principal who was able to be an instructional leader in the school built upon the foundation laid by the professional development provided by the coaches. Principals also provided support to teachers through their management of resources, including time, personnel, and funds to implement the effort. Ross and Gray (2006) found that “it may be defensible to hold principals accountable for student achievement if it can be demonstrated that principals influence achievement indirectly by creating the organizational conditions through which improved teaching and learning occur” (p. 813) They further stated that “schools with higher levels of transformational leadership had higher collective teacher efficacy, greater teacher commitment to school mission, school community, and school-community partnerships, and higher student achievement” (p. 798). The principal as leader in the school and the community, not as just a manager, but an agent of change, can create a success-oriented learning community.

The creation of a school community with a success-orientation creates high expectations for both students and teachers. In our finding *You Don't Have to be a Coal Miner*, teachers spoke to the challenges of teaching in the Appalachian region. Intergenerational rural poverty presents unique challenges. The loss of jobs in the traditional coal mining region has had an even more devastating effect in the area. “In remote rural communities, where jobs are scarce, jobs with benefits even scarcer, and there is little likelihood of serious investment, growth, or economic development, the loss of a significant portion of the safety net implies serious consequences for the economic condition of poor people in poor places” (Thorne, Tickamyer, & Thorne, 2004, p. 356). The impact of rural poverty seeps into the school, and research has documented the negative impact poverty has on reading skills (Kainz & Vernon-Feagans, 2007; Hernandez, 2011). Sadly, “schools with a track record of failure often lose incentive to improve because they rationalize failure as the inevitable consequence of serving impoverished children” (Payne, 1984). When the cause of academic failure is endemic and rationalized as innate in the child, this mindset must be refuted and teachers must be equipped with the

development to produce successful outcomes with their students.

When comparing teachers who embraced the reading program to those who either left or resisted, Carol Dweck's mindset research resonates. The juxtaposition of a fixed mindset with a growth mindset, as described by Dweck, allows one to not only be responsive to new information, but also view oneself and other as continuous learners with potential to expand one's knowledge and skills:

Mindset change is not about picking up a few pointers here and there. It's about seeing things in a new way. When people change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework. Their commitment is to growth, and growth takes plenty of time, effort, and mutual support (Dweck, 2007, p. 254).

The emphasis on teacher efficacy is built on the idea that characteristics of teachers are not fixed, "rather, that they are malleable and dynamic within a rich, professional context that encourages learning and growth" (Ferguson 2010, p. 341). These teachers clearly benefitted from principals who held a growth mindset about their staff capacity to learn and grow.

There is hope in the work of Kainz and Vernon-Feagans (2007) who describe, "Aspects of the family are especially predictive of reading skills at kindergarten entry. However, over time, characteristics of schools and classrooms may become stronger determinants of children's reading development" (p. 421). Herbers et al (2012) further describe how early intervention, specifically at first grade, can change the trajectory of achievement for children living in poverty: "Early reading achievement may be even more important for later learning among students who experience higher levels of risk" (p. 370). Therefore, "understanding how first-grade achievement functions as a foundation of future achievement can inform efforts by educators and policy makers to promote early educational success for children at risk" (p. 373). Children living in poverty need not succumb to a cycle of low expectations and low performance. Early reading intervention can make a difference.

***Mining the Key Concept #3: The effectiveness of the Reading Initiative is tied to strong literacy-minded leadership. Where principals operated as instructional leaders, the program saw its strongest potential for sustainable results.***

Our third project question focused on the sustainability of the reading initiative

once ECF had phased out its support. In our interviews and surveys, we found that in schools where buy-in was strong and student achievement was rising, there was both strong support as well as strong desire to continue the reading initiative. From our themes *Riding the Wall*, *Hire Me Back When I Retire*, and *Laid Back Fall Back*, the continued emphasis on strong instructional leadership as well as the necessity of continuous professional development was heard. Not only are these factors needed to successfully implement the program, there are critical to the sustainability of the efforts over time.

Strong literacy-minded instructional leadership is key to success of the reading initiative. Principals cannot simply “ride the wall”, or casually observe what happens in their schools. Proactive instructional leadership is required to both implement and sustain change. Nettles and Herrington (2007) infuse instructional leadership into their identifiers of effective school leadership:

1. safe and orderly environment
2. mission and vision
3. stakeholder involvement
4. monitoring school progress
5. instructional focus
6. high expectations for student performance
7. professional development

From this list, one could identify the factors that we observed and heard about in our school visits that speak to principal effectiveness. The ECF initiative calls upon principals to work in each of these areas, but those who succeeded had a strong understanding of their role in every area both individually and globally. As Nettles and Herrington further discuss, “By far, the most robust impact that a principal can hope to have is via the mediated relationships within a school. However, it is essential that all potential sources of principal impact on student achievement be considered to assist these school leaders in building capacity for ongoing performance improvement in their schools” (p. 733). Relationship building, though not specifically on the list, is central to this work and facilitates the factors listed.

To be literacy-minded instructional leaders, principals need to develop literacy-based pedagogical and content knowledge, as well as effective coaching and feedback skills. This work is time-consuming in a principal’s schedule already packed with necessary administrative work. Principals find themselves in “tensions” with their often conflicting roles: proactive versus reactive approaches to leadership, facilitative versus directive

approaches to leadership, and building consensus versus gaining compliance (Mitchell and Castle, 2005). The authors further address this tension: “The question is not whether principals are doing instructional leadership correctly, effectively, and efficiently, but how aware principals are of what they are doing in the guise of instructional leadership. This direction departs from current emphases because it honours the complexities and tensions that inhabit instructional leadership, it positions leaders as thoughtful reflective professionals, and it disrupts the technical rational assumptions of best practice discourse.” (p. 428). The principal role in instruction is crucial because “the educational part of a school principal's role sets such individuals apart from leaders in other organizations, and we believe that removing principals from the instructional equation would have deleterious effects on the intellectual climate in schools and on the capacity of school people to build exciting and stimulating learning environments” (p. 430).

However, the principal cannot carry the load of instructional leadership alone. In successful ECF schools, every principal had a strong partner with whom he or she worked to implement the program. These partners included assistant principals, reading specialists, librarians, and guidance counselors. The sustainability of the project requires that principals have in-house support to provide professional development for teachers, as the ECF coaches are phased out. Several of the veteran teachers nearing retirement age made the suggestion to “hire me back when I retire” as part-time reading coaches or other support personnel for the schools.

The sustainability of the initiative requires that veteran teachers continue to refine their pedagogy and implementation, that teachers moving to new grade levels receive updated training, and novice teachers have access to the full professional development package of training and coaching. This requires that the school district have dedicated literacy coaches to fill these roles. Elish-Piper and L’Allier (2011) found that both the amount of time literacy coaches spent with teachers, as well as the activities in which they were engaged during that time (specifically conferencing, administering and discussing assessments, modeling, and observation) were significant predictors of student reading gains on one or more reading levels. Bean et al (2002) found that “a reading specialist can be an important member of the school community if that individual has the skills and abilities to perform the role, a supportive administration that provides the time and resources to do the job, and the energy and commitment to serve in a role that has multiple demands” (p. 743). From both our findings, as well as the research literature, we can say that the investment in knowledgeable and skilled literacy coaches has the potential to sustain and build on the success already achieved under the reading initiative.

## CONCLUSION

The challenges of rural Appalachia extend beyond communities and into classrooms. Our capstone study examined the efforts of the Elgin Children’s Foundation in their mission to “break the cycle” of intergenerational poverty. Since the fall of 2010, ECF has dedicated much of its human and financial capital towards improving reading performance in the youngest, poorest, and most vulnerable populations of Southern Appalachia. Our analysis of the *Elgin Reading Initiative* centered on program fidelity, program efficacy, and program sustainability over time. Central themes from interviews highlight the importance of school leadership and teacher voice prior to the launch of the *Reading Initiative*. Although the majority of schools demonstrated high levels of program fidelity, as determined by both curricular and scheduling changes, they differed in their understanding of the 90% reading goal. As many of these schools transition to sustaining the *Reading Initiative* without the support of ECF, continued efforts toward developing a shared vision of student reading outcomes is necessary at the school and district level.

Instructional leadership and professional development were among the key findings that influenced the efficacy of the *Reading Initiative* on student reading performance. Stories of ever-present principals and effective coaching models, coupled with student performance data, offer insight into the capacity of teachers to improve classroom instruction with ongoing training and consistent feedback. These are the essential elements that support student learning, as evidenced by the schools making significant progress in student reading performance.

As schools prepare for the years ahead without the support of the ECF coaches, many remain concerned about program sustainability. Beginning with personnel challenges in recruiting and retaining effective teachers, key findings point to the need for strong and consistent instructional leadership to continue building the capacity of veteran teachers while supporting the needs of inexperienced teachers. Another key finding underscores the financial burden of replenishing instructional materials for teachers and students.

The ECF has played an integral role in “breaking the cycle” of poverty by engaging schools and communities in raising student reading outcomes and, in turn, improving life outcomes. The *Reading Initiative* promotes early literacy across Appalachia by setting supporting schools in making changes to curricula, scheduling, teacher training, and use of assessment data. Based on our findings from the triangulation of interviews, surveys and student performance data, we present several key recommendations in the final section.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendation 1: Institute school-based literacy coaches to support sustainability.**

*The ECF literacy coaches have been a vital part of the implementation of the Elgin Reading Initiative. Teachers and principals in our study point to coaches as a key mechanism for sustaining their efforts at the school level.*

Several teachers recommended that their districts make literacy coaches available in each school. Indeed, the districts preparing for the phase out of ECF supports or those exited had already instituted district level coaches with responsibilities for multiple elementary schools or supporting grade level bands (early elementary or middle grades). Teachers asserted throughout the interviews that they felt their literacy coaches were vital to the success of the program. Interestingly, even teachers who were lukewarm about the *Imagine It!* reading curriculum, recognized that they were more effective with the implementation when they had the supportive advice of the literacy coaches. They also contend that having a coach in every school would ensure that supports could be provided more quickly and that accountability checks for program fidelity would also become more routine. This kind of remedy is conditioned on the presence of teachers with the instructional expertise and capacity to serve as coach. Given the ECF's broad knowledge of teachers working within each partner school, we recommend that the organization provide districts and principals with their own assessments of classroom teachers who may be a good fit for the school based coaching role. Also, several soon to retire teachers indicated that they would like to be hired as a school based coach, which could serve as a starting point for the identification of potential school based coaches. Where funding is not adequate to hire a full time coach, the retired teacher could serve in a part-time capacity.

### **Recommendation 2: Permit districts flexibility to shift reading scheduling to 2-hour block.**

*Given some of the unintended consequences of the 3-hour block, we recommend the block be revised on a school-by-school basis with support for the bottom quartile of students occurring during the existing workshop hour.*

Teachers reported that the 3-hour literacy block had a number of unintended consequences including a narrowing of the curriculum and a lessening in their own opportunities to work with struggling students. They felt that amount of time spent in reading instruction meant less time for math, science, social studies, and writing/language arts based activities. The remedial block as currently instituted involves bottom-performing students being pulled out to receive *Reading Mastery*, and classroom teachers working with the remaining students on reading activities. These activities were generally less structured than the *Imagine It!* block or teachers' workshops and they were prevented from

introducing new content during this hour. Instead, a number of teachers proposed that the 3-hour block be collapsed into a 2-hour reading block which would allow the lowest performing students to receive remedial support during the workshop hour.

**Recommendation 3: Continue ongoing summer onboarding & training.**

*The issue of teacher retirements, grade level placement changes, and new hires all require a proactive and ongoing training approach. We recommend the ECF continue to assist transitioning districts with summer professional development and support.*

All key informants interviewed expressed the need for continuing professional development and training to support the reading program implementation. District leaders were pleased that ECF provided summer training to districts that had already exited the program. This unexpected development was a welcome surprise, and allowed the districts to deploy their own limited resources to other areas. ECF should continue to support ongoing summer training as part of its sustainability planning. This professional development is particularly vital given the number of new teachers that are entering elementary classrooms and an anticipated increase in the numbers of retiring teachers. Additionally, even teachers who have been teaching in ECF partner schools may require ongoing training to build capacity and new skills. As teachers change grade level placements from year to year, they also need to be re-trained on their new grade level reading curriculum.

A majority of the teachers within our survey sample (64%) have been teaching more than 11 years and the topic of retirement was raised repeatedly in interviews. These veteran teachers were anxious to see the reading program continue, but often expressed that the fidelity of implementation would suffer if the intensity of ongoing training and support was not maintained by their districts. In a few cases, partner school districts have contracted with the ECF literacy coaches to help to facilitate some ongoing support during the school year. This is a promising sign that could be further supported by a commitment to provide ongoing summer onboarding and training.

**Recommendation 4: Convene principals within Elgin partner schools for periodic sharing of best practices.**

*The principals in our study exhibited a number of promising practices that helped support reading implementation. However, many practices were not widely shared and increased communication between principals could help spur further innovation and student achievement. We recommend the ECF convene principals to support best practice sharing.*

As we noted in our finding about the centrality of leadership to effective

implementation, strong principals helped to create a culture of both accountability and support that allow their teachers to lead their students to impressive reading gains. The principals in our sample noted their work with the ECF Principal Coach and how he assisted them with analyzing their data more effectively in order to affect instructional changes. Still, it was apparent from our observations that the level of principal skill in offering instructional leadership varied widely between schools. Principals also noted they felt somewhat siloed in their work and would benefit from interaction with other principals within the ECF network. We recommend that ECF create opportunities to bring its partner principals together on a more frequent basis. The purpose of these gatherings would be to share best practices and offer a safe space for principals to ask one another questions and engage in collaborative problem solving. For example, some of the strong leadership practices we observed on individual school visits include the use of retired teachers to teach the *Reading Mastery* program or having students take ownership of their personal test score data with individual binders in which they set personal goals and track their own progress. Principal sharing is particularly important because since the start of the *Elgin Reading Initiative*, new schools have been added and a number of former principals have left their roles and been replaced by new leaders. As the ECF relinquishes its formal involvement in the reading program in partner districts, convening principals for periodic best practice sharing is a promising strategy to support sustainability.

**Recommendation 5: Initiate district sustainability planning meetings to negotiate the transition from Elgin funding.**

*In order to support continued implementation of the Reading Initiative, we recommend that the ECF initiate meetings with each district, including partner school principals. These meetings would allow the ECF to leverage funding and training to set the terms of any continued partnership(s).*

Finally, ECF should engage each district in a proactive conversation about sustaining the reading initiative. Given the important role that school principals play in the implementation fidelity of the reading program, these sustainability conversations should include the principal voice. The purpose of these planning sessions would be to strategize about the next steps of the reading programming. Ideally, these conversations would lead to a commitment to continue with the reading curriculum and scheduling changes in exchange for agreements from ECF around ongoing professional development and principal convenings.

Some of the concerns our research team heard from teachers and principals were the budgetary considerations of purchasing new consumable student materials like decodable texts and workbooks that are showing their age after 4-5 years of program implementation. Teachers informed the team that they had been instructed to start

photocopying reading materials in anticipation of decreased funding next year. Several expressed a desire to upgrade their materials from the latest iteration of the *Imagine It!* curriculum which has been rebranded as the McGraw Hill series *Open Court Reading*. Addressing each of these budget sustainability concerns will be an important aspect of the planning meetings. While the ECF may or may not be able to or willing to meet each of these financial concerns, the planning meetings can help to define the parameters where collaboration can be ongoing and helpful to both parties.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Research Matrix

Appendix B: Teacher Survey Email

Appendix C: Teacher Survey

Appendix D: Teacher Interview Protocol

Appendix E: Teacher Survey with Aggregate Responses

## APPENDIX A: Research Matrix

Constructs	Themes	Evidence		
		Key Quotes	Documents	Observations
<b>Philanthropy in K12 Education</b>				
Elgin Initiatives				
<b>Implementation Fidelity</b>				
Implementation: 90% Goal				
Implementation: Scheduling				
Implementation: Curriculum				
Implementation: Assessments & Data Use				
Implementation: Reading Coaches & Professional Development				
<b>Efficacy</b>				

Examples of How Program Works or Doesn't				
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<b>Program Sustainability</b>				
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Program Sustainability: Human Capital				
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Program Sustainability: Budget/Financial				
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Program Sustainability: Leadership				
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Program Sustainability: Organization (District-level)				
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<b>Cultural Context</b>				
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Culture of Poverty				
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School Culture & Context				
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<b>Recommendations</b>				
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## APPENDIX B: Teacher Survey Email

*Purpose of the survey:* This survey is part of a qualitative study seeking to describe the implementation of the Elgin Children's Foundation (ECF) reading reform effort and to determine the effectiveness and sustainability of this project.



### Elgin Reading Initiative --- Teacher Survey

Dear Colleague,

My name is Michael Cormack, and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy at Vanderbilt University. With my fellow doctoral students Jennifer Vest and Nancy Wong, I am completing a qualitative study seeking to describe the implementation of the ECF reading

reform effort and to determine the effectiveness and sustainability of this project. The findings of this study will be used to help the ECF design future programming in schools.

An important part of this study involves surveying teachers in the 45 schools participating in the Elgin reading project. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Completion of the survey should take approximately 15--20 minutes. The risks associated with your participation are minimal. We will keep all information you provide confidential and will only use it for the purposes of this study. All responses will be statistically compiled into summaries and will not be presented in any way that would identify you personally.

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Michael Cormack at 662--444--5325 or [michael.cormack@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:michael.cormack@vanderbilt.edu).

Thank you in advance for your assistance,

**Michael Cormack, Jennifer Vest, and Nancy Wong**  
Vanderbilt University

[Complete Survey](#)



[Forward this email](#)



Try it FREE today.

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## APPENDIX C: Teacher Survey

Welcome to the survey for elementary school teachers.

*Purpose of the survey:* This survey is part of a qualitative study seeking to describe the implementation of the Elgin Children's Foundation (ECF) reading reform effort and to determine the effectiveness and sustainability of this project.

*Procedures:* Completion of the survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes.

*Confidentiality:* The team of researchers from the Vanderbilt Ed.D. cohort in Educational Leadership & Policy will keep all information you provide confidential and will only use it for the purposes of the study. Responses will be statistically compiled into summaries and will not be presented in a way to identify you personally.

*Participants:* Teachers at Elgin participating elementary schools are invited to participate in this survey.

*Benefits of Participation:* The researchers are investigating this question in order to inform the ECF on the implementation, effectiveness, and sustainability of its reading reform project. The findings of this study will be used to design future programming in schools.

*Risks of Participation:* The risks associated with your participation are minimal.

*Voluntary Participation:* Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary.

*Contact Information:* If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Michael Cormack at **662-XXX-XXXX** or [michael.cormack@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:michael.cormack@vanderbilt.edu).

---

My school adopted Elgin's 90% reading goal.

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

The Imagine It! Reading curriculum covers the various skills needed to teach my students to become grade level readers (i.e. phonics, decoding, comprehension).

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The Imagine It! Reading curriculum provides adequate opportunities for differentiation (meeting the needs of both high level and lower level learners).

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

My school offers at least 120 minutes of daily morning reading instruction.

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

My school provides at least 60 minutes of daily reading intervention for students below grade level.

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

How many times in the past year were you observed by an Elgin reading coach?

- 0 times
- 1 time
- 2-3 times
- 4-5 times
- 6 or more times

On average, how long after your observation with an Elgin reading coach did you receive feedback (written or verbal)?

- Within 1-2 days
- Within 1-2 weeks
- Within a month
- More than a month later
- Did not usually or ever receive feedback

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Elgin reading coach feedback?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Post-observation feedback was credible (demonstrated observer’s knowledge of pedagogy and/or reading).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post-observation feedback identified areas of strength in my performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post-observation feedback identified areas of expected growth/areas in which I am expected to improve.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post-observation feedback was consistent between different Elgin coaches who visited my classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post-observation feedback was consistent between my Elgin coaches and my school’s	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Elgin coaching resources and supports:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Specific resources were provided to help me learn and grow in the areas identified in my observation feedback.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The professional development and training I received throughout the year (or semester, depending on frequency of survey) was tailored to my specific needs/development areas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the outcomes of the Elgin coaching model:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Overall, my sessions with Elgin coaches have helped me make improvements in my teaching practice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, my sessions with Elgin coaches have helped me make a better teacher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My work with Elgin coaches has had a positive impact on student achievement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What was the most helpful activity you participated within the last year or support you received that helped you address your areas of growth or think about instruction differently? [This includes but is not limited to a school based coach, peer coaching, a specific professional development event, etc.]

In what ways, if any, is the Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) MAP assessment used in your school? (Check all that apply)

- Data walls
- Teacher reflection
- Discussion in grade level or subject area Professional Learning Communities
- Grade level retention and promotion decisions
- Forming intervention and enrichment groups
- Observation debriefing conversations
- Parent meetings or discussions
- None of the choices
- Don't know
- Other

I currently work at...

How do you classify your position at THIS school, that is, the activity at which you spend most of your time during this school year?

- Regular full-time teacher
- Regular part-time teacher
- Long-term substitute (i.e., your assignment requires that you fill the role of a regular teacher on a long term basis)
- Teacher aide or Assistant Teacher
- Student teacher
- Other professional staff (e.g., counselor, curriculum coordinator, social worker)
- Library or Media Specialist

Approximately how long have you been working at this school? Do NOT include time as a student teacher.

- 0 - 1 years
- 2 - 3 years
- 4 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- More than 10 years

What was your MAIN activity LAST school year (2014-2015)?

- Teaching in this school
- Teaching in a public elementary or secondary school
- Teaching in a private elementary or secondary school
- Student at a college or university
- Working in a position in the field of education, but not as a teacher
- On leave
- Military service
- Unemployed or seeking work
- Other

Excluding time spent on maternity/paternity leave or sabbatical, how many school years have you worked as an elementary- or secondary-level teacher in public, public charter or have you worked as an elementary- or secondary-level teacher in public, public charter or private schools?

- 1 - 2 years
- 3 - 4 years
- 5 - 7 years
- 8 - 10 years
- 11 or more years

**Which statement best describes the way YOUR classes at THIS school are organized?**

- You instruct several classes of different students most or all of the day in one or more subjects (sometimes called Departmentalized Instruction).
- You are an elementary school teacher who teaches only one subject to different classes of students (sometimes called an Elementary Subject Specialist).
- You instruct the same group of students all or most of the day in multiple subjects (sometimes called a Self-Contained Class).
- You are one of two or more teachers, in the same class, at the same time, and are jointly responsible for teaching the same group of students all or most of the day (sometimes called Team Teaching).
- You instruct a small number of selected students released from or in their regular classes in specific skills or to address specific needs (sometimes called a "Pull-Out" Class or "Push-In" Instruction).

***Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We appreciate your help!***

## APPENDIX D: Teacher Interview Protocol

### Elgin Children's Foundation Capstone (2015-2016)

#### Interview Protocol

#### Research Questions:

- How was the literacy program implemented across schools? How, and to what extent, has literacy instruction changed as a result of the Elgin reading reform effort?
- What do implementation patterns indicate regarding the impact (actual and potential) on school culture?
- What factors (including human capital, financial, organizational, leadership) influence the long term sustainability of the program?

**Conceptual Framework:** philanthropy in K-12, program sustainability, efficacy

#### Statement of Consent:

*Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences with the Elgin Foundation and the reading intervention program. The information you share with me will be used to help our research team better understand the implementation of the program, its influence on school culture, and the potential long-term sustainability of the program. Your name or other identifiable information will not be attached to any reporting of findings that we gather, as we want you to feel comfortable sharing your experiences with us. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?*

#### Faculty / Counselor / Administrator Questions:

#### Ice Breaker:

1. (Comment about classroom or school environment noticing)

#### Academic Background:

2. How long have you been teaching/working in education?
3. Describe your professional preparation in teaching reading.
4. How long have you been here at \_\_\_\_\_? Were you here before/during the Elgin partnership?

#### Program Components (goals, content, process, teaching, professional development)

5. What is the 90% reading goal?
6. What do you know about the Imagine It Reading Program?
  - 6a. How is your school using Imagine It?
7. What do you know about the Reading Mastery Intervention Program?
  - 7a. How is your school using Reading Mastery?
8. How did your school approach reading instruction before partnering with the Elgin Foundation?
9. How did the implementation of the Elgin Reading program impact reading instruction?
10. What are the expectations on teachers around reading instruction?
11. What are the demands on teachers, specifically around reading instruction?
12. What did professional development entail with the Elgin foundation?

13. Describe the role of the reading coaches. (Probe for specifics)

### **Program Impact**

14. What role has the Elgin Foundation program played in your school? (probes below)

14a. access to resources

14b. structures

14c. organizational changes

14d. cultural shifts

15. After \_\_\_ years, think back to the beginning of the partnership with the Elgin Foundation, how would you describe the outcomes of the Elgin partnership? (probes below)

15a. student reading performance

15b. reading instruction

15c. influence on school culture

16. What do you think contributed to these outcomes?

### **Sustainability**

17. Where is your school in the implementation process? (then proceed with following context specific questions depending on school's year of implementation)

17a. Are there any plans for when the Elgin Foundation phases out their involvement with the Reading Program?

17b. Do you think the program will be sustainable? Why or why not?

17c. What would your school need in order to keep the Reading Program sustainable?

18. How has the school approached literacy this year following the end of the partnership?

19. What can you tell me about why the partnership was not renewed this year?

## Questions for School Principals

### Lessons

20. What lessons were learned through this partnership? (probes below)

20a. reading content and pedagogy

20b. instructional coaching

20c. use of resources (people, time, funding)

20d. use of data

20e. collaboration with organizations

### Coaching

21. Describe your work with the Elgin principal coach.

22. What successes do you attribute to your work with the Elgin principal coach?

23. What challenges remain with implementing and sustaining the program?

24. What recommendations do you have for Elgin coaches with other partner schools?

## Appendix E: Teacher Survey w/Aggregate Responses

1. Excluding time spent on maternity/paternity leave or sabbatical, how many school years have you worked as an elementary- or secondary-level teacher in public, public charter or have you worked as an elementary- or secondary-level teacher in public, public charter or private schools?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	1 - 2 years	11	6%
3	3 - 4 years	17	9%
4	5 - 7 years	20	10%
5	8 - 10 years	22	11%
6	11 or more years	127	64%
	Total	197	

2. How do you classify your position at THIS school, that is, the activity at which you spend most of your time during this school year?



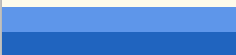


Answer	Response	%
Regular full-time teacher	184	91%
Regular part-time teacher	1	0%
Long-term substitute (i.e., your assignment requires that you fill the role of a regular teacher on a long term basis)	1	0%
Teacher aide or Assistant Teacher	6	3%
Student teacher	0	0%
Other professional staff (e.g., counselor, curriculum coordinator, social worker)	8	4%
Library or Media Specialist	3	1%
Total	203	



Answer	Response	%
0 - 1 years	14	7%
2 - 3 years	22	11%
4 - 5 years	24	12%
6 - 10 years	37	19%
More than 10 years	102	51%
Total	199	

3. Approximately how long have you been working at this school? Do NOT include time as a student teacher.

4. Which statement best describes the way YOUR classes at THIS school are organized?

#	Answer	Bar	Response	%
1	You instruct several classes of different students most or all of the day in one or more subjects (sometimes called Departmentalized Instruction).		37	19%
2	You are an elementary school teacher who teaches only one subject to different classes of students (sometimes called an Elementary Subject Specialist).		5	3%
3	You instruct the same group of students all or most of the day in multiple subjects (sometimes called a Self-Contained Class).		119	61%
4	You are one of two or more teachers, in the same class, at the same time, and are jointly responsible for teaching the same group of students all or most of the day (sometimes called Team Teaching).		5	3%
5	You instruct a small number of selected students released from or in their regular classes in specific skills or to address specific needs (sometimes called a "Pull-Out" Class or "Push-In" Instruction).		28	14%
			194	

5. What was your MAIN activity LAST school year (2014-2015)?

Answer	Response	%
Teaching in this school	174	87%
Teaching in a public elementary or secondary school	9	5%
Teaching in a private elementary or secondary school	0	0%
Student at a college or university	4	2%
Working in a position in the field of education, but not as a teacher	11	6%
On leave	0	0%
Military service	0	0%
Unemployed or seeking work	0	0%
Other	2	1%
Total	200	

6. My school adopted Elgin's 90% reading goal.

Answer	Response	%
Yes	191	79%
Don't Know	47	20%
No	3	1%
Total	241	

7. The Imagine It! Reading curriculum covers the various skills needed to teach my students to become grade level readers (i.e. phonics, decoding, comprehension).

Answer	Response	%
Agree	133	55%
Disagree	25	10%
Neither Agree or Disagree	21	9%
No Basis for Judgment/ Did Not Adopt	9	4%
Strongly Agree	48	20%
Strongly Disagree	7	3%
Total	243	

8. The Imagine It! Reading curriculum provides adequate opportunities for differentiation (meeting the needs of both high level and lower level learners).

Answer	Response	%
Strongly Agree	40	16%
Agree	125	51%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	28	12%
Disagree	31	13%
Strongly Disagree	10	4%
No Basis for Judgment/ Did Not Adopt	9	4%
Total	243	

9. My school offers at least 120 minutes of daily morning reading instruction.

Answer	Response	%
Yes	232	94%
Don't Know	3	1%
No	11	4%
Total	246	

10. My school provides at least 60 minutes of daily reading intervention for students below grade level.

Yes	231	94%
Don't Know	5	2%
No	11	4%
Total	247	

11. How many times in the past year were you observed by an Elgin reading coach?

Answer	Response	%
0 times	42	19%
1 time	34	15%
2-3 times	83	37%
4-5 times	41	18%
6 or more times	27	12%
Total	227	

12. On average, how long after your observation with an Elgin reading coach did you receive feedback (written or verbal)?

Answer	Response	%
0 times	42	19%
1 time	34	15%
2-3 times	83	37%
4-5 times	41	18%
6 or more times	27	12%
Total	227	

13. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Elgin reading coach feedback?

Question	S. Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	S. Disagree	Total
Post-observation feedback was credible (demonstrated observer's knowledge of pedagogy and/or reading).	56 (25.9%)	108 (50.0%)	41 (18.9%)	9 (4.1%)	2 (0.9%)	216
Post-observation feedback identified areas of strength in my performance.	54 (25.0%)	102 (47.2%)	44 (20.4%)	13 (6.0%)	3 (1.4%)	216
Post-observation feedback identified areas of expected growth/areas in which I am expected to improve.	48 (22.5%)	118 (55.4%)	37 (17.4%)	8 (3.8%)	2 (0.9%)	213
Post-observation feedback was consistent between different Elgin coaches who visited my classroom.	39 (18.1%)	84 (39.1%)	56 (26.0%)	26 (12.1%)	10 (4.7%)	215
Post-observation feedback was consistent between my Elgin coaches and my school's administration.	45 (21.0%)	97 (45.3%)	53 (24.8%)	13 (6.1%)	6 (2.8%)	214

14. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Elgin coaching resources and supports:

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Specific resources were provided to help me learn and grow in the areas identified in my observation feedback.	39	92	48	13	4	196
The professional development and training I received throughout the year (or semester, depending on frequency of survey) was tailored to my specific needs/development areas.	38	87	48	18	5	196

15. What was the most helpful activity you participated within the last year or support you received that helped you address your areas of growth or think about instruction differently? [This includes but is not limited to a school based coach, peer coaching, a specific professional development event, etc.]

- Vocabulary support Observation from Elgin Coach
- Observing the classroom teacher do a lesson. The school coach has been the most help for me.
- Grade-level meetings with my peer teachers to discuss ways to enhance learning. KVEC Summer Institute
- Getting POSITIVE FEEDBACK after you have taught regardless of the differing opinions of different coaches and considering vast and various differences in individual students data based on MAP scores discussion
- Vocabulary activity peer coaching
- Dan Mulligan Seminar
- I went to a district Title I meeting, where our county's Reading Coach showed us some fun activities. peer coaching, pd
- Having a coach model the comprehension strategies for me- summarizing clarifying asking questions adjsuting reding speed elgin coach modeling specific strategies to teach vocabulary
- Talking with peer teachers, especially teachers who are teaching the same level as myself. Peer

coaching

- PD
- PD Elgin training
- District Test Data Analysis Concept Question Board
- Imagine It! reading training and after school professional development on various classroom topics (conducted by the school and guest speakers.)
- School-based coach acting our vocabulary peer coaching
- The reading coach provided staff development for our faculty Talking with peers.
- I received the needed materials that I lacked.
- Title I professional development provided by school Title I teachers and district reading coaches. Having a reading coach come in and teach a lesson to my class.
- Tamara Williams --Reading Supervisor for Tazewell Co. Schools who made SOL binders for reading. a few helped
- Feedback from observations Training
- Professional Development on SFA Wings and Roots NA
- To not stray from the material provided to do the reading program, being consistent Visiting other teacher classrooms to watch them teach
- School Based Coach
- Elgin coach helping me to help a student with processing delays, working at his pace instead of to frustration. peer coaching
- The English SOL Institute in Abingdon, VA Individual feedback pertaining to instruction Peer observations
- vocabulary building activity
- Peer Coaching and Elgin Training for new teachers Round table sharing of workshop ideas with other schools
- Different t and new ideas to enhance learning in my classroom. Summer PD academy

SRA Leadership Trainings with Beth Comer
The positive feedback.
The school based coach helped with daily questions.
Peer conferencing
school based reading mastery
SRA training over the reading strategies. This seemed hard to teach in kindergarten but after the training I felt more confident in introducing the strategies and students have caught on well.
Differentiated games for workshop
Sharing successful reading activities with other teachers in our district at our PD Academy.
Modeling by the coaches
Peer coaching
On our Way to the Ron Clark Academy
how to differentiate instruction for special needs students
Professional Development where teachers shared ideas
Training
N/A
peer coaching
SRA workshop six years later professional development
None
Professional Development for teacher leaders with Elgin
Elgin Leadership Academy
Learning about student teacher game
peer coaching
school coach
school based coaching from my reading coach
Workshops related to reciprocal teaching (similar to the comprehension strategies used in the Imagine
Mrs. Rountree gave us excellent resources and ideas during her visit
modeling from Elgin coach on teaching blending and Decodable procedures
school reading coach
Debriefing sessions with Elgin coach, Instructional Coach and Principal
Comprehension



16. In what ways, if any, is the Northwest Evaluation Association’s (NWEA) MAP assessment used in your school? (Check all that apply)

Answer	Response	%
Data walls	113	57%
Teacher reflection	146	73%
Discussion in grade level or subject area Professional	144	72%
Grade level retention and promotion decisions	119	60%
Forming intervention and enrichment groups	164	82%
Observation debriefing conversations	82	41%
Parent meetings or discussions	145	73%
None of the choices	2	1%
Don't know	6	3%
Other	8	4%

17. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the outcomes of the Elgin coaching model:

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
Overall, my sessions with Elgin coaches have helped me make a better teacher.	46 (23.5%)	87 (44.4%)	44 (22.4%)	12 (6.1%)	7 (3.6%)	196
My work with Elgin coaches has had a positive impact on student achievement.	43 (22.2%)	92 (47.4%)	42 (21.6%)	11 (5.7%)	6 (3.0%)	194

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